



Clark

Misslow C. Chambers
from his off—
Uncle Ben
Aunt Em
1889—





Harry Casterton

ROD AND GUN SERIES.

DON GORDON'S
SHOOTING-BOX.

BY

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"ROUGHING IT SERIES," ETC.



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CONTENTS.

294

CHAPTER I.

	PAGE
THE MILITARY ACADEMY.....	5

CHAPTER II.

DON AND BERT AT SCHOOL.....	18
-----------------------------	----

CHAPTER III.

HAZING A "PLEBE".....	36
-----------------------	----

CHAPTER IV.

THE NEW YORK BOOT-BLACK	55
-------------------------------	----

CHAPTER V.

DON AND BERT HAVE VISITORS.....	73
---------------------------------	----

CHAPTER VI.

CONY RYAN'S PANCAKES.....	92
---------------------------	----

CHAPTER VII.

RUNNING THE GUARD.....	111
------------------------	-----

CHAPTER VIII.	
	PAGE
HOW DON GOT IN.....	131
CHAPTER IX.	
DON'S YANKEE INVENTION.....	152
CHAPTER X.	
BREAKING UP THE "SET".....	173
CHAPTER XI.	
THE STUDENTS IN CAMP.....	192
CHAPTER XII.	
THE DESERTERS AT THE SHOW.....	215
CHAPTER XIII.	
A NIGHT ATTACK.....	237
CHAPTER XIV.	
DON GORDON'S SHOOTING-BOX.....	260
CHAPTER XV.	
LESTER BRIGHAM MAKES NEW FRIENDS.....	285
CHAPTER XVI.	
THE MAIL-CARRIER IN TROUBLE.....	307
CHAPTER XVII.	
CONCLUSION.....	330

DON GORDON'S SHOOTING-BOX.

CHAPTER I.

THE MILITARY ACADEMY.

“WELL, now, I am disgusted.”

“So am I. I call it a most unusual proceeding.”

“That is a very mild term to be applied to it. *I* call it an outrage. The Professor has deliberately gone to work to disgrace the school and every student in it.”

“That’s my opinion. I shall give my father a full history of the case in the next letter I write to him ; and I incline to the belief that he will order me to pack my trunk and start for home.”

“I know that is what my father will do. Why, fellows, just think of it for a moment ! What if this street gamin, who has been brought here as the Professor’s pet, should accidentally win a warrant at the next examination ?”

"Or a commission ! That would be worse yet. Wouldn't a gentleman's son look nice obeying his orders—the orders of a bootblack ?"

"I'll never do that. I'll stay in the guard-house until I am gray-headed first."

"Well, I won't. I'll go home first."

This conversation took place one cold, frosty morning in the latter part of January, 18—, among the members of a little party of boys who were walking up the path that led to the door of the Bridgeport Military Academy. There were a dozen of them in all, and their ages varied from thirteen to sixteen years. They looked like young soldiers, dressed as they were in their neat, well-fitting uniforms of cadet gray, set off by light blue trimmings ; but it seems that they were anything but good soldiers just then, for their words indicated a determination on their part to rebel against lawful authority.

The Bridgeport Military School was a time-honored, wealthy, and aristocratic institution. It was modeled after the school at "the Point," and although its course of study differed materially from that pursued at the national academy, its rules of discipline were almost the same. It was

intended to fit boys for college, for business, for civil or mining engineering, or for West Point, if they wanted to go there and could command influence enough to secure the appointment ; and in order that they might begin early in life to realize the majesty and dignity of law, and to see the necessity of submitting to it as becomes good citizens of the republic, they were put through a course of military drill as strict as that to which they would have been subjected if they had been private soldiers in the regular army.

The majority of the students—there were nearly three hundred of them in all—were deeply in love with the school, and with every body and every thing connected with it. Although they were obliged to study hard for seven months in the year to avoid being dropped from their classes, and to watch themselves closely in order to keep within the rules, they were allowed two seasons of rest and recreation during the year ; a faithful student could always obtain a pass for an evening, provided his standing as a soldier was what it should be, and warrants and commissions were to be obtained by anybody who was willing to work for them. More than that, the institution was en-

deared to them by a thousand old-time associations. The fathers of some of the present students had sat in those same seats, pronounced their orations from that very rostrum, handled those same muskets and swords, and been drilled at the identical guns that still composed the battery, and their sons had heard them speak in the highest terms of the benefits derived from the instructions they had there received during the days of their boyhood. Under these circumstances it was no wonder that the students took pride in their school, and that the most of them had come there with the determination that no act of theirs should in any way detract from its high and long-established reputation.

But if these were the sentiments of some of the boys, there was a small but busy minority who cherished feelings that were exactly the reverse—boys who had been sent there because they could not be controlled at home, who were restive under the restraints that were imposed upon them, and whose sole object was to complete the course and get away from the school with as little trouble to themselves as possible. These were the fellows who were always in trouble. They did not mind

their hard lessons so much as they did the fatiguing drills with muskets and broadswords. They envied the officers in their class on account of the authority they possessed, the extra privileges that fell to their lot, and the respect they demanded from the rest of the students ; but they were not willing to work for a commission themselves, and they did not like those who were. They ran the guard at every opportunity to eat pancakes with Cony Ryan, who was quite as important a personage at Bridgeport as Benny Havens is, or used to be, at West Point, and did penance for it the next Saturday by performing extra duty as sentries with bricks in their knapsacks. When they saluted a member of the class above them, as the law required them to do, they did it in a very sullen and ungracious manner ; but if a member of the class below them neglected his duty in this respect, they were prompt to take him to task for it.

The two meanest boys in school were Tom Fisher and Clarence Duncan, who, at the time our story opens, had been members of the academy just two years. They were smart enough at their books and stood well in their classes when they felt in the humor to apply themselves ; but their

record as soldiers was something of which they ought to have been ashamed. Tom, to put it in plain English, was a sneak, and Clarence was a bully, who boasted of his ability to whip any boy in school. These boys had a good many adherents among the students, and if there were any mischief done about the village it was pretty certain to be traced home to them.

The two seasons of rest and recreation of which we have spoken were the camping-out frolic, that came off in August, and the vacation, which began on the 15th of September and continued until the 15th of January. Then the boys went home to spend the holidays and show their uniforms. When the time came to go into camp no one was excused except upon the surgeon's certificate of disability. In fact there were very few among them who ever asked to be excused. Even the most studious had grown tired of their books by this time, and were anxious to get out among the hills where they could breathe invigorating air, go trout-fishing and botanizing, and in various other ways brace up their nerves in readiness for the searching examination that was to be held immediately on their return to the academy.

This camp was intended as a school of review. Theory was reduced to practice, and those of the students who kept their eyes and ears open, and tried to profit by the instructions there received, were almost sure to pass the examination with flying colors. The civil engineers surveyed the bar in the river, just as their fathers had done before them; staked out the best route for a canal around the falls, and laid out a railroad and got everything in readiness for tunneling the hills to let it through. The military engineers, under cover of a hot fire of blank cartridges from the battery, threw pontoon bridges over the creek, and when they were finished, the infantry, which had been concealed in a ravine close by, charged across them and swarmed up the opposite heights to dislodge an enemy that was supposed to be intrenched there. They fortified the hills to prevent the approach of an invading army, sent out scouts to scour the surrounding country, held drumhead courts-martial, and tried everybody who was reported for any misdemeanor; in fact, they did everything that soldiers do when they are in the field.

Perhaps two or three days would be spent in

this way, and then there would come two or three days of rest, during which the young soldiers would roam about the woods and fields, going wherever their fancy led them. When the examination came off, the graduates were presented with their diplomas and the degrees that the institution was empowered to confer, new officers were appointed from among the students, the classes were reorganized, new applicants were received, and everything was made ready for work at the beginning of the new school year.

At the time of which we write the school had been in session about two weeks. Two hundred and fifty of the old students had returned, and the places of the large number who were graduated at the close of the last term were filled by the second class, which became the first ; the third became the second, the fourth became the third, and the new fourth was made up of the "Plebes" who had signed the muster-roll. Why the newcomers were called "Plebes," which is short for "plebeians," it is hard to tell. Perhaps it was because their fathers, in the days of their boyhood, had given that name to all new scholars, or it may have been for the reason that everybody was down

on them. They certainly looked out of place there. They still wore their citizens' clothes, the uniforms for which they had been measured when they first arrived not having yet been received. They were not allowed to go on dress-parade because they could not handle a musket ; and as they had not yet been " broken in," they were a little too independent in their conduct to suit the old students, who exacted the greatest show of respect from those who were below them.

Among these " Plebes " was one whose advent created the profoundest astonishment among some of the students. The boys we have already introduced to the reader were talking about him as they came up the path. They were Tom Fisher and his crowd. Having drawn the capes of their overcoats over their heads, they were strolling leisurely along, paying no heed to the cutting wind that swept across the snow-covered parade-ground ; but the thinly clad young fellow who came up the path behind them was shivering violently under its influence. His hands and face were blue with cold, and his feet were so poorly protected that he was obliged to stop now and then and stamp them on the ground to get them

warm. The noise he made attracted the attention of Tom Fisher and his companions, who turned to see what had occasioned it.

"Here he comes now," exclaimed Dick Henderson, a fair-haired, sunny-faced little fellow, whose mother would have been ashamed of him if she had known what sort of company he was keeping at the academy. "Say, you fellow, where are your manners?"

Only one short year ago Dick was a "Plebe" himself; but now he was a third class boy, and he was resolved that everybody should know it and treat him accordingly.

"Let him go, Dick," said Tom Fisher, in a tone of disgust. "You would be highly honored by a salute from a bootblack, wouldn't you, now?"

"Who are these?" said Clarence Duncan, in a low tone.

Tom and his crowd looked down the path and saw two other new-comers approaching. In appearance they were very unlike the shivering, half-frozen boy who had just gone along the path. They were warmly clad, wore sealskin caps and gloves, and there was something in their air and

bearing that proclaimed them to be boys who respected themselves, and who intended that others should respect them. One of them was tall and broad-shouldered, and carried himself as though he had never been in the habit of submitting to any nonsense, and the other was small, slender, and apparently delicate.

“Why, they are the Planter and his brother,” said one of the students, all of whom had had opportunity to learn more or less of the history of the boys who composed the fourth class. “They’re from Mississippi. Their father is worth no end of money, and they say he gives his boys a very liberal allowance.”

“Then they’ll be good fellows to foot the bills at Cony Ryan’s, will they not?” said Fisher.

“They say that the little one is a saint,” chimed in Dick Henderson. “He never does anything wrong; but his brother must be a brick, for he was expelled from the last school he attended on account of some violation of the rules.”

“Then he’s the fellow for us,” said Tom Fisher. “We must make it a point to see him after taps.”

The near approach of the new-comers cut short the conversation. Tom and his crowd strolled

leisurely on, filling up the path so completely that it was impossible for any one to pass them without stepping out into the deep snow that had been thrown up on each side. This the new scholars did not seem inclined to do. The smaller one came up behind Dick Henderson, and placing the back of his hand against his arm, said pleasantly :

“Will you be good enough to give us a little room ?”

Tom and his friends faced about at once, and the former stepped up to the speaker and laid his hand rather heavily on his shoulder.

“Look here, Plebe,” said he, in an insolent tone. “‘Subordination is of discipline the root ; when you address an old cadet, forget not to salute.’ Mind that in future.”

“Take your hand off that boy, or I will salute you with a blow in the face that will bury you out of sight in that snowdrift,” said he who had been called the “Planter.”

“Who are you ?” demanded Fisher.

“Take a good look at me so that you will remember me,” was the reply.

The boy drew off his gloves and pulled down his muffler, revealing the familiar features of our

old friend, Don Gordon. Just then the clear notes of a bugle rang out on the frosty air. It was the "study call," and all the students within hearing made haste to respond to it.

CHAPTER II.

DON AND BERT AT SCHOOL.

DON GORDON and his brother Hubert were two of the heroes of the *Boy Trapper* series. Those who have met them before will not need to be told what sort of boys they were ; and strangers we will leave to do as the boys of the Bridgeport Academy did—become acquainted with them by degrees. They lived near the little town of Rochdale, in the State of Mississippi, where their father owned an extensive cotton plantation. That was the reason why the students, who had a new name for every new-comer, called Don the Planter. The last time we spoke of him and Hubert was in connection with the building of a *Shooting-Box* on the site of the one that had been burned by Bob Owens and Lester Brigham. We then informed the reader that the new structure was much better than the old one, and that is all we shall say about it until such time as the owners get ready to take possession of it.

After Bob Owens ran away from home to be-

come a hunter, and Godfrey Evans and his son Dan went to work to earn an honest living, and David Evans became *mail carrier*, and Lester Brigham withdrew himself from the society of the boys in the neighborhood, the inhabitants of Rochdale and the surrounding country settled back into their old ways, and waited for something to happen that would create an excitement. They marveled greatly at the sudden change that had taken place in Godfrey and Dan, talked of the indomitable courage Bob Owens had displayed on the night the steamer Sam Kendall was burned, and cast jealous eyes upon David Evans, who, they thought, was making money a little too rapidly, and throwing on a few more airs than were becoming in a boy who had a woodchopper, and a lazy and worthless one at that, for a father.

Rochdale was like some other country towns that you may have heard of. The people, most of whom had been impoverished by the war, were envious of one another, though outwardly they were friendly, and all one had to do to gain enemies was to be successful. If he made money one year by planting potatoes, when the next season came around everybody planted potatoes. If he

set up a blacksmith shop or opened a store, and seemed to be prospering, some one was sure to start opposition to him. When David Evans began riding the mail route for Don Gordon's father, who had the contract, and exchanged his rags for warm and durable clothing, and purchased a fine horse for himself, there were a good many who thought that he was getting on in the world altogether too fast. His most bitter enemy was Mr. Owens, who had tried so hard to secure the contract for his son Bob, the runaway. He generally rode a very dilapidated specimen of horseflesh, and whenever David passed him on the road, mounted on his high-stepping colt, Mr. Owens always felt as though he wanted to knock him out of his saddle.

"Just look at that beggar on horseback!" he would say to himself. "Things have come to a pretty pass when white trash like that can hold their heads so high in the air. If it hadn't been for him and that meddlesome Gordon, Bob might have been riding that route now instead of roaming about the world, nobody knows where. If the opportunity ever presents itself I'll get even with both of them for that piece of business."

As for Don and Bert, they hardly knew what to do with themselves. Their private tutor left them—being a Northern man he could not stand the climate—and then they were as uneasy as fish out of their native element. They galloped their ponies about the country in search of adventure, paddled around the lake in their canoe, roamed listlessly through the woods with their guns in their hands ; in short, to quote from Don, they became as shiftless and of as little use in the world as ever Godfrey Evans had been.”

“I don’t at all like this thing,” the general one day said to his wife, “and there must be a stop put to it. The boys will grow up as ignorant as the negroes. I shall pack them both off to school.”

Mrs. Gordon thought of the way in which Don had conducted himself at the last school he attended (he had been expelled from it on account of the “scrapes” that his inordinate love of mischief brought him into), and made no reply.

“I have not forgotten that unfortunate occurrence,” said the general, who well knew what was passing in his wife’s mind. “But I think it was a lesson to Don, and one that will never fade from

his memory. Being blessed with wonderful health and strength, he is fairly overflowing with animal spirits, and some of his surplus energy must be worked off in some way. I'll put him where he will be held with his nose close to the grindstone. I'll send him to Bridgeport."

"Do you think he can endure the discipline?" asked the anxious mother, who knew how easily Don could be governed by kindness, and how obstinate he was under harsh treatment.

"He'll have to; it is just what he needs. After he has spent six hours in racking his brain over the hardest kind of problems in mathematics, and two hours and a half more in handling muskets and broadswords under the eye of a strict drill-master, he will feel more like going to bed than he will like running the guard to eat Cony Ryan's pancakes and drink his sour buttermilk. I know, for I have been right there."

When General Gordon once made up his mind to a course of action he lost no time in carrying it into effect. Before the week was passed he and his two boys were on their way to Bridgeport, where they arrived in time to learn something of the life the students led while they were in

camp. The veteran superintendent welcomed the general as an old friend and pupil, received him and his boys into his marquee, and took pains to see that the latter made some agreeable acquaintances among the members of the first class, who showed them every thing there was to be seen. Bert did not have much to say, but Don was all enthusiasm.

“That’s the school for me,” said he to his father when they were on their way to Rochdale, after Don and Bert had passed their examination and been admitted as members of the academy. “How nicely those fellows were drilled, and what good-natured gentlemen all the instructors are! We shall have easy times during the first year. It will seem like play for me to go back to the beginning of algebra again.”

The general smiled, but said nothing until they reached home and the boys began to get ready to go back to the academy at the beginning of the school year. Then he tried to make them understand that “easy times” were entirely unknown in Bridgeport; that the instructors, although they were “good-natured” enough to the guests they met while in camp, were the sternest and

most inflexible of disciplinarians in the barracks ; and that there was as wide a gulf between them and the students as there was between the officers and privates in the army. Somehow Don could not bring himself to believe it, but before many months more had passed over his head he found out that his father knew what he was talking about. He made his mother the most solemn promises in regard to his behavior, assuring her that he had been in "scrapes" enough, and that henceforth he would give her and his teachers no trouble ; and when he made those promises he was fully resolved to live up to them. He was then entirely unacquainted with the temptations that fell to the lot of a Bridgeport student. Cony Ryan's pancakes and surreptitious sleigh-rides had no charms for him, neither had the guard-house and extra duty any terrors, because he did not know that there were any such things. But they were soon brought to his notice, and perhaps we shall see how he kept his promises after that.

The night of the 15th of January found Don and Bert installed in their room in the academy. It was large enough to accommodate two single

beds, a steam-heater, a washstand, a table, and two chairs. At the foot of each bed was a small cupboard, in which they were to keep their uniforms, after they got them, and also their officers' swords, if they were fortunate enough to win them at the next examination. Bert was poring over his French lesson, while Don, who was more than a year ahead of his class in all his studies, was reading the "Rules and Regulations" that hung upon the wall. There were fifty rooms on that floor, all occupied by boys who were supposed to be studying their lessons for the morrow. The only sound that broke the stillness was a steady tramping in the hall.

"I wish that fellow, whoever he is, would go into his room and keep still," said Bert, after he had waited a long time for the tramping to cease.

"He'll not go away until he is relieved," replied Don. "He is a sentry. I have just been reading about him. He has charge of all the rooms on this floor, and it is his duty to suppress all loud talking or laughing, and to inspect the rooms occasionally to see that the occupants have not slipped out."

"Where would they go if they did slip out?" asked Bert.

"I am sure I don't know," replied Don, as he walked up to the heater and held his hands over it. "Neither do I see why one should want to leave a comfortable room like this to parade around in the deep snow, even if there *were* a place to go to pass the evening. It's fearful cold up here in this country, isn't it?"

When Don and Bert left their Southern home the air was balmy, the birds were singing, a few early flowers were beginning to bud under the genial influence of the sun, and they carried their overcoats done up in shawl-straps; but long before they reached their journey's end they had put on all their heaviest clothing, and when the train brought them into Bridgeport they found the streets blocked with snow, and the river covered with a sheet of ice that was fourteen inches in thickness. The dreary winter scene that met their gaze every time they looked out of the academy windows made them shiver involuntarily, and it was no wonder that they wanted to hug the fire.

"Suppose that sentry should find a room

empty when he looked into it?" said Bert, without replying to his brother's question. "What then?"

"It would be his duty to report the owners," said Don.

"That looks almost too much like tale-bearing," answered Bert. "I don't like the idea; do you?"

"No, I don't; but what is a fellow to do about it? If it ever comes our turn to stand sentry during study hours, we can take our choice between doing our full duty, without fear or favor, and being reported and punished ourselves for negligence. I know what my choice will be. * If the boys don't want me to report them, they must live up to the regulations."

When Don said this he meant every word of it; but after he had been at the academy a few weeks, Bert noticed that he never gave expression to such ideas as these. He learned how to keep his back turned toward a room when he had reason to believe that the owners desired to "take French" for the evening; and when he was certain that they were out of harm's way, he could open the door of that very room, and without much stretching of his imagination convert the

"dummies" that occupied the beds into living, breathing students. It soon became known to a certain class of boys that the Planter was a "brick," who would rather get into trouble himself than report any of his schoolmates ; and they were not slow to take advantage of his good-nature. That was the term the students applied to his neglect of duty ; but the superintendent called it disobedience of orders, and Don was punished accordingly.

"What was that noise ?" exclaimed Bert, suddenly.

"It sounded like a drum," answered Don.

And that was just what it was. A couple of drummers were walking around the building, every now and then giving their instruments a single tap.

"It certainly means something," said Bert, with no little anxiety in his tone ; "but I am all in the dark."

So was Don. He was about to propose that they should step out into the hall and ask the sentry to enlighten them, when the door suddenly opened and that dreaded functionary thrust his head into the room.

"I say, Plebe," he exclaimed, nodding to Don, "give us your name, will you?"

Don wonderingly complied, and the sentry drew a note-book from his pocket and wrote something in it.

"Very unpleasant piece of business," said he, "but it can't be helped. Orders are orders, as you will find before you have been here a great while. Next time keep your ears open."

"Why, what's the matter?" inquired Don. "Have we done anything wrong?"

"I should say so. Why didn't you douse your glim? Did you not hear the signal?"

"We heard a drum, if that's what you mean," said Bert.

"That was 'taps,' and it meant 'lights out.' Put that lamp out at once."

"We'll do it just as soon as we get ready for bed," replied Bert, jumping up and pulling off his coat.

"Put it out, I tell you," exclaimed the sentry. "Put it out *now*, and undress in the dark, as the rest of the fellows do. You had better take my advice and slumber lightly, for after the morning gun is fired you will have just six minutes in

which to get into your clothes and fall in for roll-call. Pleasant dreams."

"Humph!" said Bert, as the sentry closed the door and went out into the hall to inspect the other rooms. "How can a fellow's dreams be pleasant when he knows that he is going to be reported in the morning? This is a bad beginning, Don. Although we have not been here twenty-four hours, we have got onrselves into trouble already."

This reflection worried Bert, who always tried hard to obey the rules of the school he attended, and considered himself disgraced if he were taken to task for violating any of them; but it had no more effect upon Don than water has on a duck's back. He tumbled into bed and slept soundly, while Bert, who was very much afraid that he might not hear the morning gun, lay awake during the greater part of the night. Toward morning he sank into a troubled slumber, from which the solemn booming of the field-piece aroused him.

He and Don were out on the floor and putting on their clothes before the deep-toned reverberations that came from the hills on the other side

of the river had fairly died away. There was no time lost in stretching and yawning—not a second wasted in waking up. The drums were beating in the drill-room, and the fifes were shrilly piping forth the first strains of the three tunes that constituted the morning call. Before the second tune was finished, Don and Bert, following the lead of the crowd of students they found in the hall, ran into the drill-room and took their places in line.

There were four companies in all, each one numbering, when the school was full, seventy-five members. They were all officered by boys, the highest in rank being the lieutenant-colonel, while the superintendent of the academy, or one of the instructors, acted as commandant of the battalion. The companies were drawn up on the four sides of the spacious drill-room, in which all the battalion and company exercises and ceremonies were held during bad weather, the members standing at “parade rest.” In front of each company stood the upright, soldierly figure of the first sergeant, note-book in hand. Behind him stood his boy captain, while the officer of the day, his arms folded across his breast, critically surveyed

the scene from his post near the door. The instant the last notes of the reveille died away business commenced.

"Attention, company!" shouted all the first sergeants in a breath; whereupon the students brought their heels in line, dropped their hands by their side, turned their eyes to the front, and assumed the position of a soldier.

The roll was called in less than two minutes, and after the first sergeants had reported to their captains, and the captains had reported to the adjutant, and the adjutant had reported to the officer of the day, whose duty it was to report the absentees to the superintendent, the guards for the day were detailed, the ranks were broken, and the students hurried away to wash their hands and faces, comb their hair, and put their rooms in order for morning inspection. After that came two hours of hard study. Then the sick-call was sounded, followed shortly afterward by the enlivening strains of "Peas upon the Trencher," which was the summons to breakfast. The different companies were marched to and from the dining-hall by their quartermaster-sergeants, and when the ranks were broken the students were

allowed an hour to "brush up" on their lessons for the day, or to stroll about the grounds and watch guard-mount. At nine o'clock the bugle called them to their respective recitation-rooms, and from that time until one they were kept at work at their books. After dinner an hour was allowed for rest and recreation. From two until half-past three there were more recitations, followed by a long and fatiguing drill, and then liberty until sunset. Then came the dress-parade of the battalion; and when that was ended the day's work was over with everybody except the guards and those who were behind with their lessons for the next day. After supper and another hour of recreation, the bugle called "to quarters," and that was a sound that nobody liked to hear. It meant that all the fun was over for that day, that every boy must go to his room at once and keep quiet after he got there, under penalty of being reported by the sentry who had charge of that floor.

After this description of the routine of study and drill that was pursued at the academy, the reader will understand how Don Gordon passed the most of his school-days during the next four years. How he passed his vacations it is the pur-

pose of this series of books to relate. It will be seen also that he was allowed very little time in which to study up plans for mischief. In fact he did not think of such a thing *yet*, for he had come there firmly resolved to do his best, and to win a record for himself that his father should be proud of; but still he did feel very revengeful while he and his brother were standing in front of the superintendent's desk, listening to the sharp reprimand that was administered to them for neglecting to extinguish their light at taps. This was the same "good-natured gentleman" who had greeted them and their father so cordially when they visited his camp during the previous summer, but he did not talk as he did then. He used cutting words, and laid down the law in tones that had made more than one culprit tremble. Don did not mind it in the least, for he was used to being scolded by his teachers; but when he saw how Bert took it to heart, he became so angry that he could hardly hold his peace.

"That's just the kind of a man that I like to get the advantage of," said he to himself; "and if I had a few good fellows to help me, I would set him and his rules at defiance. I just know I could

slip out of my room and get off the grounds at night ; and if I had any place to go to spend the evening, I would try it and see what he would do about it."

Don made this up all out of his own head. He had never heard of such a thing as running the guard, and he thought of it now simply as a daring exploit, and one that he would undertake without a moment's hesitation if there were anything to be gained by it. He was in just the right humor to be manipulated by such fellows as Fisher and Duncan ; and into their hands he fell before he had worn the academy uniform forty-eight hours. They took him up because they hated him and wanted to get him into trouble, and it was only by an unexpected stroke of good fortune that he escaped from their clutches. What he did to arouse their animosity shall be told further on.

CHAPTER III.

HAZING A "PLEBE."

"WE'LL settle with you at some future time, my fine gentleman," said Tom Fisher, as he and his companions ran toward the academy in obedience to the call of the bugle. They had spent the hour after breakfast in strolling about the grounds, discussing the history of one of the new students, as we have related in the first chapter.

"All right," replied Don Gordon, winking at his brother, who laid his finger on his lips and shook his head warningly. "Whenever you want to see me just send me word, and I will be on hand."

"You may get some of that independence whipped out of you before you have been here many more days," chimed in Clarence Duncan.

"Who'll do it?" asked Don, cheerfully.

"I will," replied Duncan, in savage tones.

"O, you can't. It's bred in the bone. But I'll

tell you one thing—you and your partner there," added Don, nodding his head toward Tom Fisher. "You want to keep your hands off my brother, or I'll make spread-eagles of the pair of you."

"Well, that beats anything I ever heard of!" exclaimed Dick Henderson, opening his eyes in surprise. "You have good cheek to talk of making 'spread-eagles' of such fellows as Fisher and Duncan, haven't you, now?"

"Do you think so, little one?" asked Don. As he said this he patted Dick on the head in a most patronizing way—an action on his part that caused Dick to jump aside and bristle up like a bantam that had been poked with a stick. "Well, you hang around and you will see it done, unless they take my advice and mind their own business," added Don.

Fisher and Duncan did not have an opportunity to reply to this threat, for just then they reached the door and found one of the teachers standing there. They were somewhat behind time, and they were obliged to hasten to their dormitories and take off their caps and overcoats so that they could march to their recitation-rooms with their classes. They looked daggers at

Don as they went up the stairs, but he smiled back at them in the most unconcerned manner possible.

"I knew he was a tough one the moment I put my eyes on him," said Fisher that night after drill hours, when he and about fifty other students were exercising their muscles in the gymnasium. "There isn't another fellow in school who can do that."

The subject of these remarks was Don Gordon, who had just come out dressed in neat dark-blue trunks and flesh-colored tights. His arms were bare to the shoulder, revealing muscles at which the boys around him gazed in admiration. His first act was to walk up to the nearest swing, take hold of one of the rings and draw himself up to his chin twice in succession with one hand.

"I tell you, Duncan, you had better let him alone," continued Fisher, still watching Don, who was now going hand over hand up a rope toward the lofty ceiling.

"And swallow everything he said to me this morning?" exclaimed the bully.

"No, I didn't mean that," Fisher hastened to reply. "Those insulting remarks must of course

be taken back and apologized for ; but you can't make him do it alone."

"Just give me the chance, and I'll show you whether I can or not," answered Duncan, who was always angry whenever there was any imputation cast upon his prowess. "He has come here intending to set at naught all the old-time customs of the institution—haven't you noticed how persistently he refuses to salute everybody but an officer?—and if we are willing to stand by and let him do it, I say we are a pack of cowards. He must be made to come down from his high horse."

"And he shall be," said Fisher, encouragingly. "We will attend to that bootblack's case to-night, and the first good chance we get we'll take Mr. Gordon in hand. By the way, Duncan——"

The two boys drew off on one side and entered into a whispered consultation, now and then beckoning to one or another of their friends, until there were a dozen or more students gathered about them. They conversed earnestly together for a few minutes, and then put on their clothes and left the gymnasium. Don and Bert Gordon followed them soon after, and on giving their names to the orderly in the hall, were admitted to

the presence of the superintendent. After they had both saluted him, Don said :

“Colonel, we have brought with us a letter of introduction from our father, addressed to Mr. Packard, who is a relative of one of our nearest neighbors, and if you have no objections we should like permission to present it to-night.”

“Certainly,” said the superintendent, as he picked up a pen and pulled a sheet of paper toward him. “You can go immediately after supper, and I will write you a pass. You ought to have presented it when you first came. Why did you put it off so long?”

“Why—I—you know, sir, that we received a reprimand on the morning following our arrival here for not putting out our light at ten o’clock,” faltered Don, “and I was afraid you would think we ought to stay inside the grounds until we had learned to obey the rules.”

“Ah, yes,” said the superintendent with a smile. “I believe I remember something about that. Well, it did you good, did it not? You haven’t been reported since. I hope your record at the end of your course will be as good as that of your father, who, I must say, was a very

exemplary student. It is true that he did run the guard now and then, the temptations at Cony Ryan's proving rather too strong for him ; and when he was here with you last August, I think he told me that while he was a member of my school he spent forty-three Saturdays in walking extras ; but, for all that, he was a good boy—a *very* good boy. Here's your pass."

Don expressed his thanks for the favor, and he and Bert saluted and retired, lost in wonder.

"Running the guard !" repeated the former, in a loud tone. "What does that mean ?"

"What's walking an extra ?" said Bert, in the same low voice ; "and who is Cony Ryan ?"

"Here comes Egan ; we'll ask him," said Don.

The individual referred to was a first-class boy, and the first sergeant of Don's company. When he was on duty he was a soldier all over ; but during the hours of recreation he was as jovial and friendly a fellow as there was to be found about the academy.

"Say, sergeant," said Don, not forgetting to salute, "what does a cadet do when he runs the guard ?"

"What does he do ?" repeated the sergeant.

"Why, he spends a good portion of the next Saturday afternoon in walking an extra to pay for it."

"I mean, how does he run the guard?" explained Don.

"Now, Gordon, isn't that just the least bit—you know," said the sergeant, laying his finger by the side of his nose and looking very wise. "You surely don't expect me to tell you how it is done, do you? You had better ask Fisher or Duncan, or some of that crowd. They have had considerable experience in it."

"We want to know what the meaning of the expression is," said Bert.

"O, that's it! Well, when a fellow slips out of his room, gets off the grounds without being caught, and comes back in the morning in time to fall in and answer to roll-call, we call that running the guard. By walking an extra we mean doing additional guard duty. The reason that Saturday is selected as a day of punishment is because the afternoon is given over almost entirely to recreation; but those who have been arrested while attempting to run the guard, or who have been caught in other acts of disobedience, are not

allowed to take advantage of those hours of recreation, because they have already had their fun. Understand?"

Don said he did; and then he inquired who Cony Ryan was, and what he did to tempt the boys.

"Cony Ryan!" repeated the sergeant, his eyes growing brighter and a smile overspreading his face, as the memory of old times came back to him. "Why, he is a part of the academy, and I have seen the day when I thought we could not possibly get along without him. He keeps a neat little house down by the big pond, where he serves up the best pancakes *I* ever ate. His mince and pumpkin pies top the heap; and as for his maple molasses—ah!"

The sergeant walked off, smacking his lips, and Don and Bert kept on up the stairs.

"I rather think Egan has been there," observed the latter.

"I know he has," replied Don, "and the taste of that maple syrup clings to his palate yet."

On entering their room Don threw himself into a chair, stretched his legs out before him, buried his hands in his pockets, and gazed down at the

floor in a brown study ; while Bert leaned his elbows on the table, rested his chin on his hands, and looked at him. Presently Don threw back his head and laughed so loudly and heartily that his brother was obliged to laugh too.

"I never dreamed of such a thing," said Bert, who knew what was passing in Don's mind.

"No more did I. Just think how that dignified father of ours must have looked running the guard and standing punishment for it afterward ! He took good care not to say a word to us about it, didn't he ? I say, Bert," exclaimed Don, suddenly, and then he as suddenly paused.

"Don't you do it," said Bert, earnestly. "You will be certain to get yourself into trouble by it."

"If I did, I should be perfectly willing to take the consequences. But father couldn't haul me over the coals for it, could he ?"

"If father were here now, he wouldn't think of doing such things."

"Neither would I if I were a man."

"But you won't go to Cony Ryan's, will you ?" .
pleaded Bert.

"Of course not. Don't borrow any trouble on that score. I promised mother that I would

behave myself, and I am going to do it. But I should like to taste those pies and pancakes, all the same," added Don, to himself.

That evening, after supper, Don and Bert showed their pass to the sentry at the gate, and set out to pay their long deferred visit to Mr. Packard. Why was it that they did not think to read that pass when it was given to them? If they had, they might have saved themselves from something disagreeable that afterward happened. They passed a very pleasant evening at Mr. Packard's house, and at half-past ten they took leave of their new friends and started for the academy.

As they were walking briskly along the road that ran around one end of the big pond, they heard an indistinct murmur of voices, and presently saw a crowd of boys, who were walking in a compact body, pass across the road in front of them, and direct their course toward the middle of the pond. They thought at first that it was a skating party; but as they did not stop to put on their skates, Don and Bert became interested in their movements and halted to observe them. Just then a voice, speaking in pleading accents, came to their ears.

"Don't do it, boys—please don't," it said, in piteous tones. "I wouldn't mind it so much if I could stand it, but I solemnly assure you that I can't. I have had one attack of pneumonia this winter that was brought on by exposure, and ducking me in this icy water will surely give me another."

"No it won't," replied another voice that Don knew belonged to Tom Fisher. "This is a time-honored custom, and we are not going to give it up; are we, boys?"

"Not much," answered the others, in concert.

"Our fathers were hazed when they went to this school; they, in turn, hazed others, and we couldn't think of disgracing them by refusing to follow in their footsteps," continued Tom. "Every one of the fellows you see around you—myself among the rest—has been hazed in one way or another; and are you, a New York boot-black, any better than we are?"

"Hurry him on and pitch him in," said Clarence Duncan, in his deep base tones. "Wash some of the black out of him."

"Yes, in with him," piped little Dick Henderson.

"Well, boys, if you must do it to preserve your

honor, let me take my clothes off first," said the pleading voice. "This is the only suit I have in the world, and if I get it wet I shall freeze to death, for I have no fire in my room to dry it by."

"Then go to bed," was the rough rejoinder.

"Why, what in the world are those fellows going to do?" said Bert, who had listened in great amazement to this conversation, every word of which came distinctly to the ears of himself and his brother. "I am afraid they are going to do something to somebody."

"Have you just found it out?" exclaimed Don, who now discovered that the boys were making their way toward a hole that had been previously cut in the ice. "A party of students, led by Fisher and Duncan, are going to haze a Plebe by ducking him in the pond. Now I shall have a word or two to say about that. They are the same fellows who blocked up our path this morning and wouldn't let us go by. You know they promised to settle with me some day for showing so much 'independence,' as they called it, and they might as well do it now as any other time."

"O Don, mind what you are about," cried Bert.

"I will. I'll black the eyes of some of them before they shall stick that boy through the ice. Why, Bert, what would father say to me if he should hear that I stood by and witnessed such a proceeding without lifting a hand to prevent it? He would tell me I wasn't worthy of the name I bear."

No one who knew the temper of the academy boys, and the tenacity with which they clung to the "time-honored customs" of the institution to which they belonged, would have thought Don Gordon a coward if he had taken to his heels and made the best of his way to his room. He knew very well that if he attempted to interfere with Tom and his crowd, he stood a good chance of being ducked himself; but the knowledge of this fact did not deter him from promptly carrying out the plans he had resolved upon. It would have been bad enough, he told himself, if the students had selected as a victim a boy who had an extra suit of clothes, a change of linen to put on, and a fire to warm himself by after his cold bath; but to pitch upon one who had none of these comforts, and who ran the risk of being thrown into a dangerous illness by the folly of his tormentors, was,

in his estimation, a most cowardly act, and one that could not be too severely punished.

"Bert, you had better stay here where you will be safe," said Don.

"I'll not do it," was the prompt reply. "If you are going into danger, I am going in too."

Don, knowing that it would be of no use to argue the matter, ran out on the ice, and when he came up with the crowd his coats were off, and he was in his shirt-sleeves. Fisher and his companions stopped when they heard the sound of his approaching footsteps, and some of them acted as if they wanted to run away; but when they discovered that Don and Bert were alone, they waited for them to come nearer, thinking that perhaps they were a couple of the members of their own class who wanted to join in the sport. When they saw Don pull off his overcoat, however, their eyes were opened.

"Here comes an intruder, boys," exclaimed one of the students, "and judging by the way he acts, he is getting ready for a rumpus."

"Let him get ready," said Fisher. "There are a dozen of us. If he turns out to be a Plebe, we'll stick him in too. The more the merrier, you

know. Who comes there?" he added, raising his voice.

"A peace-maker," replied Don, throwing his coats on the ice.

"Yes, you look like it," sneered Clarence Duncan. "If that is so, what did you pull your duds off for?"

"Because I did not know how you would receive my overtures, and I thought it the part of wisdom to be prepared for any emergency," answered Don.

So saying, he walked boldly into the crowd, which gave way right and left as he advanced, and took his stand by the side of the prisoner, who was firmly held by two of the largest and strongest students, while two others stood close behind him, in readiness to lend their assistance in case he made any attempt at escape. Although Don had never exchanged a word with the boy, he knew him at once, for they belonged to the same company. It was the new student whose presence, if we are to believe Fisher and his friends, was a disgrace to the academy and everybody belonging to it. He wore the same thin clothes in which he had shivered as he walked up

the path that morning, and the keen wind that swept across the icy surface of the big pond must have chilled him to the very marrow. He had no muffler about his face nor any gloves on his hands, which he held clasped one within the other, as if they were very cold. Don looked at him and then at the comfortably clad boys who were standing around, and his blood, which was none of the coolest at any time, boiled with indignation.

"You are a pack of contemptible cowards," said he, pulling off his gloves and slamming them down on the ice.

"Why, bless our royal heart, it's the Planter!" exclaimed Tom Fisher, who now, for the first time, recognized the intruder. "Here's luck, boys. Grab hold of him, some of you, and we'll wash him too."

"If that's the Planter, this must be his brother," said Dick Henderson.

"Why, so it is," said Fisher, after he had taken a sharp look into Bert's face. "Here's more luck. Take hold of him too, boys; and since they have had the assurance to push themselves in among us without being asked, we will

give them the post of honor. We'll duck them first.'

In obedience to these orders three or four pairs of hands were laid upon Bert's arms ; but when the rest of the crowd moved forward to lay hold of Don, Duncan stepped up and stopped them.

"Stand back, all of you," said he. "I want to have a little talk with this fellow before he is put into that air-hole. Gordon, you insulted me this morning in the presence of my friends, and I want you to apologize for it at once. If you don't do it, I will give you a thrashing right here on this ice that you won't get over for a month."

"How did I insult you ? " asked Don, and the bully was somewhat surprised to see that he did not appear to be at all alarmed.

"You said you would make a spread-cagle of me. Now, which will you do, apologize or fight ? "

"Well, if it's all the same to you, I'll fight."

Duncan was fairly staggered by this reply. Remembering the exhibition of strength he had witnessed in the gymnasium that afternoon, he had no desire to come to blows with the stalwart youth who stood before him. He had hoped to frighten an apology from Don, and when he found

that he could not do it, he wished he had not been in such haste to make overtures of battle to him. But it was too late to think of that now, for his reputation was at stake. Besides he did not believe that his friend Fisher would stand by and see him worsted.

"You need have no fear of these fellows who are standing around," said Duncan, who wanted to put off the critical moment as long as he could. "They will not double-team on you."

"If they do they will take the consequences," said Don, confidently. "I think myself that they had better keep their distance.

These bold words astonished everybody.

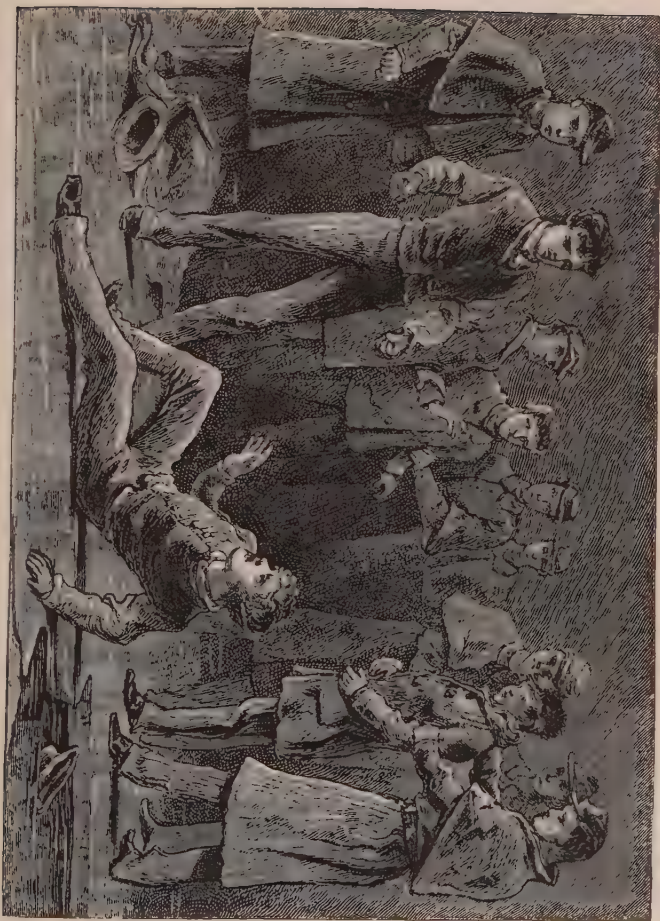
"Why I believe he thinks he can whip the whole crowd," said Henderson, who was one of the four who were holding fast to Bert's arms. Bert was a little fellow, like himself, and consequently Dick was not very much afraid of him.

"Come on," said Don, impatiently. "I am getting cold standing here in my shirt-sleeves. Give me a little exercise to warm me up. Remember I wasn't born as near the Arctic Circle as you fellows were, and for that reason I can't stand the cold as well. Hurry up, somebody—

anybody who thinks he was insulted by the words I uttered this morning."

Driven almost to desperation by this challenge, which he knew was addressed to himself, and which seemed to imply that his prospective antagonist placed a very low estimate upon his powers, Duncan pulled off both his coats, assumed a threatening attitude and advanced toward Don, who extended his hand in the most friendly manner. The bully, believing that Don wanted to parley with him, took the proffered hand in his own, and in a second more arose in the air as if an exceedingly strong spring had suddenly uncoiled itself under his feet. When he came down again he measured his full length on the ice, landing in such dangerous proximity to the hole that had been cut for the poor student's benefit, that his uniform cap fell into it.

Everybody was struck motionless and dumb with amazement. The bully was so bewildered that he did not get upon his feet again immediately, and the poor student forgot to shiver.



CHAPTER IV.

THE NEW YORK BOOT-BLACK.

“TAKE your hands off those boys,” said Don, who was in just the right humor to make a scattering among Fisher’s crowd of friends. “Release them both and do it at once, or I will pitch the last one of you into that hole before you can say ‘General Jackson’ with your mouths open. Come over here, Bert.”

He stepped up and took the prisoner by the arm, and his four guards surrendered him without a word of protest. The magical manner in which Don had floored the biggest bully in school, before whom no boy in Bridgeport had ever been able to stand for a minute, either with boxing-gloves or bare fists, and the ease with which he had done it, astounded them. They had never seen anything like it before, and there was something very mysterious in it. Did not this backwoodsman have other equally bewildering tactics at his command which he could bring into play if

he were crowded upon? Probably he had, and so the best thing they could do was to let him alone.

"Your name is Sam Arkwright, is it not?" said Don, taking one of the boy's blue-cold hands in both his own warm ones. "I thought I had heard you answer to that name at roll-call. I am a plebe too, and so we'll stand together. Put on these gloves and come with me. You will freeze if you stay here any longer. As for you," he added, waving his hand toward the students to show that he included them all in the remarks he was about to make, "you are a pack of cowards, and I can whip the best man among you right here and *now*. Pick him out and let me take a look at him."

"I am good for the best of them if they will come one at a time," said Sam. "But I give in to a dozen when they all jump on me at once."

"I will leave that challenge open," said Don, as he led Sam away. "You know where my room is, and any little notes you may choose to shove under my door will receive prompt attention."

Tom and his crowd did not speak; they had not yet recovered from their amazement. They

stood gazing after the rescued boy and his champion until they disappeared in the darkness, and then they turned and looked at one another.

“I declare, Duncan,” exclaimed Tom Fisher, who was the first to speak. “You’ve met your master at last, have you not?”

The defeated bully growled out something in reply, but his friends could not understand what it was. Like every boy who prides himself upon his strength and skill, he did not like to acknowledge that he had been beaten.

“Did he hurt you?” asked one of the students. “I noticed that you didn’t get up right away.”

“How in the name of all that’s wonderful did he do it?” inquired another. “I didn’t see him clinch or strike you.”

“He did neither,” replied Duncan, “and that’s just what bangs me. I am willing to swear that he did not touch me anywhere except on the hand, and he took hold of that just as though he wanted to give it a friendly shake. It’s a trick of some kind—a boss one, too—and I will give him my next quarter’s spending money if he will teach it to me.”

"Humph!" exclaimed Tom Fisher. "You needn't expect to him to do that. He doesn't look to me to be such a fool. You and he may come together in earnest some day—if you don't, he will be about the only boy you haven't had a fight with since you have been a student at this academy—and then you will probably find out what his tricks are."

"He didn't hurt me at all," continued Clarence; "but he could if he had been so disposed. If he had used a little more exertion he could have thrown me into that air-hole; and if I had happened to come up under the ice—ugh!" exclaimed Clarence, shivering all over as he looked down into the dark water.

"Is there no way in which we can get even with him?" asked Fisher.

"*Is* there!" replied Clarence, angrily. "Do you suppose that I am going to submit tamely to an insult like that? We'll make a way to get even with him. Things have come to a pretty pass if a plebe is going to be allowed to come here and run this school to suit himself."

The mere reference to such an unheard-of thing was enough to raise the ire of Tom Fisher

and all his companions, who with one voice declared that the Planter, having presumed to lay violent hands on an upper-class boy, and to set at defiance one of the old-established customs of the academy, must be made to suffer the consequences. They held a long and earnest consultation there on the ice, and Fisher and Duncan, who were fruitful in expedients, soon hit upon a plan which promised, if skillfully managed, to bring Sam Arkwright's champion into serious trouble. It was a most dangerous plan, because it was to be carried out under the guise of friendship.

"That's the only way to do it, fellows, you may depend upon it," said Duncan, after their scheme had been thoroughly discussed. "We must bring him into trouble with the faculty, and let them do the hazing, for we couldn't do it if we wanted to. I was nothing but a child in his grasp, and, to tell the honest truth, I have no desire to face him again."

"I hope we shall succeed," said Fisher. "But if the Planter turns out to be one of those good little boys who never do anything wrong, then what?"

If Tom had only known it, he need not have bothered his head on this point. Unfortunately for Don, something happened that very night which made it comparatively easy for the conspirators to carry out the plans they had formed regarding him.

Meanwhile Don and Bert were walking briskly toward the academy in company with the rescued boy, who was somewhat protected from the keen wind by Bert's muffler, which the latter had wrapped about his neck, and by Don's gloves which he wore upon his hands. He was lost in admiration of his new friend's prowess, and complimented him in the best language he could command.

"Are you an Irishman, sir?" Sam asked, at length.

"Look here," answered Don, "my name is Gordon—there's no 'sir' about it. No, I am not an Irishman. I am an American, I am proud to say; but I understand the Irish 'hand and foot' well enough to give it to such fellows as that Clarence Duncan. I can throw a man weighing two hundred pounds in that way if he will let me take hold of his hand."

"It was well done," said Sam. "I never saw it done better."

"I learned it of one of my father's hired men—a discharged Union soldier who came to our plantation penniless and hungry, and asked for work," said Don. "I always make it a point to pick up any little thing of that kind that happens to fall in my way. It may come handy some day, you know."

Perhaps you will now understand how Don had managed to throw the bully of the school so easily; but if you do not, we can only say that it cannot be described on paper so that you can gain even a faint idea of it. If you want to know just how it was done, the easiest way to learn is to ask some Irishman—the fresher he is from the old sod the better—to give you a practical illustration of the "hand and foot." Simply give him your hand, and if his feelings toward you are friendly, he will send you flying through the air without hurting you in the least; but if he is not friendly, we would not advise you to go to him for information, for he can turn you heels up in an instant, and land you on your head with force

enough to knock all your brains into your boots. Don had become so expert in this novel way of wrestling, and so prone to put it into practice at every opportunity, that none of the boys about Rochdale could be induced to shake hands with him.

"How did you ever happen to find your way to this school!" inquired Don, after Sam had exhausted his vocabulary in praising his new friend's skill as a wrestler. "Were you really a New York boot-black?"

"Yes, I was," answered Sam, hesitatingly.

"It is nothing to be ashamed of," said Bert, who thought from the way Sam spoke that he did not like to confess that he had once occupied so lowly a position in the world.

"Of course not," Don hastened to add. "Any honest work is honorable. Your presence here proves that you didn't want to remain a boot-black all your days."

"No, I didn't. I was ambitious to be something better," said Sam, who then went on to give Don and his brother a short history of his life. He said that his father, who followed the sea for a livelihood, had gone down with

his vessel during a terrific storm off Cape Hatteras ; that his mother had survived him but a few months ; and that after her death a grasping landlord had seized all the household furniture as security for the rent that was due and unpaid, turning him (Sam) into the streets to shift for himself. He spent the days in roaming about the city, looking in vain for work, and his nights in a lumber-yard to which he had been invited by a friendly boot-black, who found free lodgings there every night, and who, seeing Sam's forlorn condition, gave him a plate of soup to eat and furnished him with a plank to sleep on. Finding that work was not to be had, Sam at last ran in debt for a boot-black's "kit," which he procured from one of the fraternity who had saved money enough to open a corner peanut stand, and after a score or more of battles with boys whose "claims" he unwittingly "jumped," he succeeded in establishing himself in front of a popular hotel in the city, where he was to be found early and late. It was there he met the Superintendent of the Bridgeport Military Academy, who patronized him twice every day, never failing to give him a quarter

for each "shine," or to spend a few minutes in conversation with him after the boy's work was completed.

From the day he was six years old up to the time his father was lost at sea, Sam attended the district school regularly; and as he was a very faithful student, and tried hard to learn, he knew more about books than boys of his age generally do. He felt that he was out of place among the ragged, ignorant little gamins with whom he was daily and hourly thrown in contact, and they, realizing that he was not one of them, and that he believed himself to be fitted for something better than the life of a boot-black, tormented him in every conceivable way. He was so often called upon to protect his brush and his box of blacking from the young rowdies who would have despoiled him of them, that he became an adept at fighting, and it is probable that he would have opened the eyes of Tom Fisher and his crowd, had they not pounced upon him while he was asleep, and overpowered him before he could raise a hand to defend himself.

"I am sure I don't know what it was that

made the Professor take a liking to me," said Sam in conclusion, "but it was something; and when he asked me if I wouldn't like to quit that miserable business and go to school and learn to be a civil or a mining engineer, I tell you it almost took my breath away. I jumped at the chance. I gave my kit to a boy who was too poor to buy one, and came out here; and I am very sorry for it. The fellows don't want me here, and they didn't want me in New York, either. I hope I shall some day find a place where I shall not be in everybody's way."

"Don't get down-hearted," said Don, taking one of his hands out of his pocket long enough to give Sam an encouraging slap on the back. "Of course your tuition is free?"

"Yes, everything is furnished me. If it wasn't I couldn't stay here, for I have no money to speak of. The boys in New York badgered me so, and ran such heavy opposition to me that I couldn't earn enough to buy a warm suit of clothes."

"You will have an abundance of them in a day or two," said Don, "for our uniforms will be along by that time. You couldn't get an education on better terms than the Professor offers it to you,

could you? And so long as he is willing that you should stay here, you can well afford to let the fellows grumble to their hearts' content. Show the Professor that you appreciate his kindness by doing your duty like a man, and look to me for help whenever you get into trouble. Now the next thing is something else," added Don, as he and his companions came to a halt in front of the high picket-fence which inclosed the academy grounds. "Where's your room, Sam?"

"I haven't any yet. I sleep in the attic. The rooms on the floor occupied by our class are all taken except one. That has been used as a store-room, and as soon as it is cleared out I am to have it for my own."

"Well, do you want the teachers to know anything about this night's work?"

"Of course not," returned Sam, who had all a decent boy's horror of tale-bearing.

"Because, if you do," continued Don, "you can walk up to one of the guards, let him report you for being outside the grounds without a pass, and when you are hauled over the coals for it, you can say that you were taken out against your will."

"But I don't want to say that," answered Sam, quickly. "It would bring Tom and the rest into trouble. I have nothing against them, and I should be glad to be friends with them if they would only let me."

"You'll do to tie to," said Don, approvingly. "Bert and I have a pass that will see us through all right; but what are you going to do? Do you think you can make your way to the attic without being seen by any of the sentries or floor guards?"

"Tom and his crowd brought me out without attracting the attention of any of them, and I don't see why I can't get back without being caught. At any rate I shall try my best. Good-night. I hope that neither of you will ever stand in need of such aid as you have rendered me to-night; but if you do, you may count on me every time."

So saying Sam moved away in one direction, closely examining all the pickets on the fence as he went, and Don and Bert walked off in the other. When the latter arrived within sight of the main gate they were somewhat surprised to see that it was closed. The sound of their foot-

steps on the frosty snow quickly attracted the attention of the alert sentry, who came out of his box and demanded to know who they were and what they were doing there at that time of night.

"We belong to this academy," replied Don, "and have a pass from the superintendent."

"Corporal of the guard No. 4," yelled the sentry; and the call was caught up and repeated by another sentinel who stood at the farther end of the academy, and finally reached the ears of the corporal, who was toasting his shins in front of a warm fire in the guard-room.

"What do you want the corporal for? Here's our pass," said Don; and taking the paper in question from his pocket he thrust it between the bars of the gate.

Still the sentry made no reply, nor did he seem to know that Don had spoken to him. He brought his musket to a "support," and paced back and forth on the other side of the gate with slow and dignified steps. Don muttered something under his breath, and Bert believing that he was grumbling at the sentry for being so uncivil, laid his hand on his brother's arm and said, in a low tone—

“Don’t be angry with him. Perhaps he is not allowed to talk while he is on duty.”

Don said nothing. He began to believe that he and Bert had unwittingly got themselves into trouble again, and when the corporal came up, he found that he had not been mistaken.

“What’s the matter here?” demanded the officer.

“There are a couple of plebes out there who want to come in,” was the sentry’s reply.

“Who are you?” said the corporal, peering through the pickets at the two brothers.

Don gave him their names; whereupon the corporal took a key down from a nail in the sentry’s box, and after unlocking the gate told the boys to come in. They obeyed, and the officer having returned the key to its place drew a note-book from his pocket and wrote something in it. “That’s all right,” said he, as he closed the book and put it back in his pocket.

“Have we done anything wrong?” inquired Bert, in anxious tones.

“You will find that out to-morrow,” was the corporal’s very unsatisfactory answer.

“Why can’t you give a civil reply to a civil

question?" demanded Don, impatiently. "We had liberty to go outside the grounds for the evening, and here's the pass that says so."

"I don't want to see it," said the corporal, as he buttoned his overcoat and drew the cape over his head. "I know just how it reads. Come on."

"Where are you going to take us?" asked Bert, while visions of the gloomy guard-house danced before his eyes.

"To the officer of the day, of course."

"And what will he do with us?"

"That's for him to tell. Come on. It's too cold to stand here any longer."

Don and Bert fell in behind the corporal, who led the way to the guard-room, and ushered them into a little office where the officer of the day—a stern old Prussian soldier who wore a medal he had won by his gallantry on the field of battle while serving under Prince Frederick Charles—sat reading a newspaper. When the non-commissioned officer entered with his prisoners he laid the paper down and took off his spectacles.

"Vel, gorporal," said he, in a pompous tone, "vat ish the drouble mit dem gadets?"

“They have overstayed their time, sir,” said the corporal.

“Vot for you do dot?” demanded the officer of the day, turning fiercely upon the culprits. “Vot for you not come in, ha?”

“We were not aware that we had overstayed our time, sir,” answered Don. “If we had known that we were expected to return at a certain hour, we should have been here. We had a pass for the evening, and there it is.”

“Dot’s no good after daps,” said the officer of the day, turning away his head and waving his hand in the air to indicate that he did not care to look at the paper which Don presented for his inspection.

“I assure you, sir, that it was a mistake on our part,” said Bert.

But the officer of the day declared, in his broken English and with many gesticulations, that such things as mistakes were not recognized in that academy—that Don and his brother had violated the regulations and might make up their minds to be punished accordingly. Then he ordered them to their quarters, while the corporal went back to his seat by the stove.

"He didn't say that we were in arrest, did he?" said Don, as he and Bert ascended the stairs, at the top of which they met the sentry who had charge of that floor, standing with his note-book in his hand.

"Your names, please," said he, pleasantly.

"The corporal of the guard has them, and so has the officer of the day," answered Don.

"And I must have them, too," returned the sentry, holding his pencil poised in the air.

Don gave the required information in rather a sullen tone, and closed the door of his dormitory behind him with no gentle hand. As soon as Bert had struck a light he drew the pass from his pocket and read as follows :

"Guards and patrols will pass privates Donald and Hubert Gordon until half-past nine o'clock this evening."

Then he looked at his watch and saw that it lacked only a quarter of eleven. Allowing fifteen minutes for their interviews with the corporal and the officer of the day, they had overstayed their time just an hour. Bert was very penitent, but Don was inclined to be rebellious.

CHAPTER V.

DON AND BERT HAVE VISITORS.

“I WONDER if a fellow can make a move in any direction without breaking some of the numerous rules of this school and being reported for it,” said Don, throwing his overcoat and cap spitefully down upon the bed. “I declare, Bert——”

Just then the door opened and the sentry thrust his head into the room. “Put out that light, Plebe,” said he. “Two reports in one night make a tolerably bad showing, the first thing you know.”

“Catch hold of that gas-fixture and jerk it out of the wall,” exclaimed Don, as Bert hastened to obey the sentry’s order. “That makes twice it has got us into trouble.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t do that,” said the sentry, with a laugh. “You had better read the rules and regulations until you have them firmly fixed in your mind, and then, if you see fit to obey them to the very letter, you will have plain sailing.”

Don undressed in the dark and tumbled into bed, telling himself the while that he didn't care a snap of his finger for the rules and regulations. He had not purposely violated any of them, and yet he had been severely reprimanded, and was yet to be punished as though he had been willfully disobedient.

"When the leopard can change his spots and the Ethiopian his skin, I shall believe that there is some hope for me," said Don to himself, as he arranged his pillow and prepared to go to sleep. "But there doesn't seem to be much now, for the harder I try to be good the more rows I get into. I would give something to know how Tom Fisher and his crowd came out, and whether or not Sam succeeded in getting back to his attic without being seen by the guards."

Bert arose the next morning, after an almost sleepless night, full of apprehension and trembling for fear of the punishment that was to be visited upon him, while Don's face wore a defiant expression. He had slept the sleep of the healthy, and awoke refreshed and fully prepared to meet anything that might be in store for him. Greatly to his surprise and Bert's, nothing was said to them

regarding what had taken place the night before. They found opportunity to exchange a few words with Sam Arkwright, who gleefully informed them that everything was all right, and that no one was the wiser for the assault that had been made upon him by the third-class boys, and caught a momentary glimpse of Fisher and Duncan, both of whom smiled and saluted in the most courteous manner. Don did not know what this meant, but it was not long before he found out.

That afternoon all the members of the fourth class were ordered to the drill-room, where they found a quartermaster-sergeant, the captain of their company, and one of the teachers, who served out to them their new uniforms, which they were told to put on at once. When ranks were broken, Don and Bert hastened to their dormitory, and had just completed the work of exchanging their citizen's clothes for their natty suits of cadet gray, when there came a knock at the door. Bert's heart seemed to stop beating.

"That must be the orderly," said he, in an excited whisper. "If it is, we shall soon know what is going to become of us."

"Well, we might as well know one time as

another," said Don, doggedly. "I hope it is the orderly, for I have been kept in suspense long enough."

Bert opened the door, when who should appear on the threshold but Tom Fisher and Clarence Duncan. The former extended his hand to Bert, who took it after a little hesitation, while Clarence entered the room and greeted Don in the same friendly way.

"Gordon," said Clarence, as Don's sinewy fingers closed about his own, "you're a brick. We came here to tell you and your brother that we and the rest of the fellows are sorry for what happened last night, and that we want to be friends with you."

"Nothing would suit me better," answered Don.

"We have had time to consider the matter," said Fisher, seating himself on Bert's bed and depositing his cap on the table, "and we are all very glad that you didn't let us duck that Plebe. It would have been a mean piece of business to haze him in that way, seeing that he didn't have a suit of dry clothes to put on."

"Or a fire to warm himself by," chimed in

Bert, with some indignation in his tones. "Why, I never heard of such a thing. It would have been the death of him."

"It was cold, wasn't it?" said Clarence. "Well, we didn't haze him, and, as Tom says, we are all glad of it. But, I say, you make nobby-looking soldiers, you two. Did you get in last night all right?"

"We got in twice," answered Don, ruefully. "We got inside the grounds, and we got into trouble."

"How was that? Didn't you have a pass?"

"Yes; but it was only good until half-past nine, and we stayed out until half-past ten."

"Oh! ah. Well, that's nothing when you get used to it, is it, Fisher?" said Clarence.

"Nothing at all," replied Tom. "It has been a very common thing with me, and now I never think of asking for a pass. I go when I please and come back when I feel like it."

"What do you suppose they will do with us?" asked Bert, who was anxious to have that point settled as soon as possible.

"Let me see," said Clarence, thoughtfully. "Who was officer of the day yesterday?"

"I don't know his name," answered Don, "but he was the same one who instructs our class in mathematics, an old gentleman with gold spectacles, and a medal of some kind on his breast."

"Oh, that was Dutchy," said Fisher, in a tone of contempt. "He's our fencing-master also. Well, he will make the case against you as black as he can, and if he were the one to say how you should be punished, I tell you you would have a lively time of it, for he is a regular martinet. The President is a very strict disciplinarian, but he hasn't yet forgotten that he was once a boy himself, and he will probably be easy with you."

"But what will he do?" insisted Bert. "That's what Don and I want to know. And if he is going to punish us at all, why doesn't he say so?"

"Because the proper time has not yet arrived. Wait until dress-parade comes off to-night, and then you will find out all about it, for it will be published in general orders."

"Before the whole school?" cried Bert.

"Of course," answered Clarence.

Bert grew very red in the face, and looked at Don, who, in turn, stared hard at Bert.

"It is nothing to worry over," said Fisher. "Some of the best fellows in school have been gated and made to walk extras on Saturday afternoons with packed knapsacks, and that is all the punishment you will receive."

"What do you mean by 'gated'?" asked Don.

"What is a 'packed knapsack'?" inquired Bert.

"Why, when a fellow is gated he is confined inside the grounds, and not allowed to go out under any circumstances," replied Clarence.

"But he can go out all the same if he feels like it," said Fisher, with a laugh. "I never knew a fellow to stay inside the grounds simply because he was gated, unless he was one of those milk and water boys who hadn't spirit enough to say that his soul was his own."

"How can he get out?" asked Don.

"He can run the guards. Clarence and I have done it many a time."

"Were you never caught at it?" inquired Bert.

"Once or twice, but that was owing to our own carelessness. It is an easy thing to do when the right kind of fellows are on duty, and really exciting when the posts are held by such boys as Blake and Walker, and others of that sort. They're a mean set. They are always on the watch for a chance to report somebody, because they believe that that is the way to gain the good-will of the teachers."

"And a packed knapsack," continued Clarence, "is one with something heavy in it, such as bricks or paving-stones. When you are called upon to walk an extra, you have to pace up and down your beat for four hours with that knapsack on your back and a musket on your shoulder."

"That can't be very pleasant," observed Don.

"Well, I am free to confess that it isn't," returned Clarence, "and it is all owing to the way the thing is managed. If they would let us perform the extra duty while the rest of the boys were drilling, or while the class in geometry was reciting, I should not mind it in the least. But you see they won't do that. We have to work hard all the week, and walk

our extras on Saturday afternoons during the hours that are given to the good little boys for cricket, ball-playing, fishing, target-shooting and recreations of that sort."

"But overstaying our time was not the only offence of which we were guilty last night," said Don, after a moment's pause. "When we reached our room we struck a light, and I suppose we shall be reported for that."

"Of course you will," said Fisher. "You had no business to have a light in your room after taps."

"But we didn't think," said Bert. "And, besides, we wanted to read our pass, so that we might know just what we had done that was wrong."

"No odds," exclaimed Clarence. "No excuse will be accepted. You will probably be gated for a month."

"But you need not submit to the restriction of your liberty unless you feel like it," chimed in Fisher. "Do as all the best fellows in school do—run the guard, and have a good time in spite of the teachers."

"Oh, we'll never do that," said Bert, quickly.

“Will we, Don? That would only make a bad matter worse.”

Don looked down at the floor, but said nothing. He always grew restive under restraint, and having been allowed when at home to go and come as he pleased, he could not bear the thought of being confined within bounds. If Fisher and Duncan had known what he was thinking about just then, they would have said that the success of the plans they had formed the night before was a foregone conclusion.

“Well, Gordon,” said Tom, at length, “everything is all square between us, I hope.”

“Certainly it is, so far as I am concerned,” answered Don. “And I know that Arkwright does not bear you any ill-will, for he said so. You fellows ought to make matters straight with him, for he is true blue. He took a good deal of pains to work his way back to the attic without being seen, for he didn’t want the teachers to know what you had done.”

“We’ll see him and have a talk with him,” said Tom, as he arose from the bed and picked up his cap. “Perhaps we had better go, Clarence. You know what will happen to us if we fail in our

logic to-morrow. What do you think of the prospect ? ” he added, as soon as he and his crony had reached their own dormitory and closed the door behind them. “ Will he bite ? ”

“ I am sure of it,” was Duncan’s confident reply. “ He is a fellow who doesn’t like to be held with too tight a rein—I can see that plainly enough ; but Bert is a different sort of boy.”

“ What do we care for Bert ? ” exclaimed Tom. “ Don is the one we are after.”

“ I know that, and I know, too, that we could get him very easily if his brother were out of the way. These little spooneys sometimes exert a good deal of influence over their big brothers, and if he sets his face against us and our plans, our cake will be turned into dough in short order.”

“ We must see to it that Don doesn’t listen to him,” said Tom. “ We have done all we can do to-day. We have given him an idea, and now we will let him chew on it for a while. We mustn’t appear to be too eager, you know, for if we give him the least reason to suspect that we are putting up a job on him, it is my opinion that he will prove an unpleasant fellow to have around.”

As Fisher said this he picked up his logic, in which both he and Duncan had failed miserably that day, and read in a listless, indifferent tone—

“What is true with limitations is frequently assumed to be true absolutely. Thus—‘Deleterious drugs are always to be rejected; opium is a deleterious drug; therefore opium is always to be rejected.’ What’s wrong with that reasoning, Clarence?”

“I don’t know and I don’t care,” answered the latter, snatching the book from his friend’s hand and slamming it down upon the table. “Let it go until this evening, and then we will study it together. Let’s have a game of checkers now, and see if you can beat me as badly as you did the last time we played.”

“I don’t much like those fellows, Don,” said Bert, when Fisher and Duncan had taken their leave.

“I can’t see what there is wrong about them,” replied Don, who knew in a moment what his brother meant. “I am sure they acted very honorably in coming here to make things right with us.”

“I have nothing to say against that,” Bert

hastened to answer. "But I don't like to hear them talk so glibly about disobeying the rules."

"I don't know that that is any business of yours or mine either," said Don, rather impatiently. "If they are willing to take the risk, and abide the consequences if they are detected, that is their own affair. *You* needn't do it."

"I!" exclaimed Bert, in great amazement. "You may be sure that I have no intention of doing anything of the kind, and I hope you haven't, either."

"You need not waste any valuable time in worrying about me. I am able to look out for myself. But I'll tell you what's a fact, Bert: I don't think as much of this military business as I did a few weeks ago. If I were only back home with my pony, dogs and guns, I tell you I would stay there. I feel more like going out in the woods and knocking over a wild turkey than I do like sitting here in this gloomy room preparing for to-morrow's recitations."

Don opened one of the books that lay upon the table, but the page on which he fastened his eyes might have been blank for all he saw there. His mind was not upon the work that demanded his

attention. He was thinking over his recent interview with Fisher and Duncan.

"I wonder if they pass their evenings at Cony Ryan's when they run the guards?" said Don to himself. "I wonder, too, if Cony's hotel, or whatever he calls it, was in existence when my father attended this school, and if he went there to eat pancakes. If he did, I don't see how he can find any fault with me if I go there. Tom and Clarence don't seem to be such a bad lot, and it is nothing more than fair that I should meet their advances half way."

When the hour for recreation came, Don did something he had never done before in his life. Watching his opportunity he slipped away from Bert and set out to hunt up Fisher and Duncan. He did not have much trouble in finding them, for they also were looking for him. After returning his salute they slipped their arms through his and led him toward the gymnasium.

"You are a stranger here," said Clarence, "and as we know you must be lonely we will introduce you to the boys in our set, if you would like to know them."

"You will find them all tip-top fellows," added

Tom. "You see, there is a little crowd of us who run together, and somehow we manage to have good times. There are some boys here, however, with whom we never have anything to do. We will point them out to you as fast as we can, so that you can steer clear of them."

"They are high-toned lads," said Clarence, "and won't associate with any but the members of their own class. Some of them are preparing for West Point. They pride themselves on being soldiers all over; and if they can't prove their soldierly qualities in any other way, they will report somebody."

"Where's your brother?" asked Tom, suddenly.

Don replied that he didn't know where he was.

"I rather fancied that he didn't exactly like what we said about running the guard a while ago," continued Tom. "Did he?"

"No, he didn't. He wouldn't think of doing such a thing."

"Well, then, he can make up his mind to be gated on an average of once a month as long as he stays here; for no matter how hard he tries, he

can't help breaking some of the rules. If he has a mind to submit to confinement—why, that's his business and not mine."

"I haven't done it since I have been here," said Fisher, emphatically; "and, what's more, I won't."

"Where do you go when you run the guard?"

"Anywhere we please. Sometimes we spend an hour or two in skating or sleigh-riding, and when we get tired of that, we go down to Cony Ryan's after pancakes and mince-pies."

"I don't, for the life of me, see how you can get out," said Don. "There are sentries all around the grounds."

"It does require some skill and cunning, that's a fact, especially when fellows who don't like you happen to be on duty. But if the members of your own set are on post, it is easy enough. All you have to do is to give them notice of your coming, and they will turn their backs until you can creep by them."

"Go with us to-night, and we will show you how it is done," said Fisher.

"That's so!" exclaimed Clarence, as if the idea had just been suggested to him. "It will

be a good time ; another like it may not occur for a month. Will you do it, Gordon ? I dare you."

"It is a common saying in my country that a man who will take a dare will steal sheep," said Don.

"Of course he will," answered Clarence. "I knew we had not been mistaken in you."

"We haven't had any of Cony's pies and pancakes this winter," continued Tom, "and we are getting hungry for some. I have taken particular pains to find out who the sentries are, and I know that some of them are good men and true. There are some of our boys now. Come on, Gordon, and we will make you acquainted with them."

They had by this time entered the gymnasium, —a large building which stood a little apart from the academy, and was fitted up with all the appliances that are supposed to be necessary or useful in such institutions. It was filled with students who were exercising their muscles in various ways, and among them Don recognized some of the boys who had composed the hazing party. Don was introduced to them one after another, and was welcomed by them in the most

cordial manner. They spent a few minutes in talking and laughing over the incidents of the previous night ; and then, at a sign from Fisher, they drew off on one side so that they could carry on their conversation without danger of being overheard by those who did not belong to their "set."

"Fellows, Gordon is one of us ; Duncan and I vouch for him ; so you need not hesitate to speak freely in his presence," said Tom, again taking up the subject that just then was nearest his heart. "Do we go to Cony Ryan's to-night or not ?"

"Of course," replied all the boys, in chorus.

"Then that much is settled. I know who the guards are," he added, turning to Don, "and I will see you safely out and back. As soon as we are out of the building——"

"But how am I going to get out ?" interrupted Don. "You forget the sentry who has charge of our floor."

"No, I don't. Here he is," said Tom, taking by the arm a boy who had been introduced as Charley Porter. "You won't stop him, will you, Charley ?"

"I shall not know when he goes out," was the

ready answer. "I can be both blind and deaf when circumstances require that I should be so."

"You see what kind of fellows we are," said Tom. "You will never be reported for having a light after taps, or for any other offence, by one of us."

Tom then went on to tell Don just what he must do in order to make his undertaking successful, and, aided by his friends, who put in a word now and then, succeeded in making him believe that Cony Ryan's was but little short of a paradise, and that he (Tom) and his "set" had done him a great favor in bringing the house and its proprietor to his notice. He promised to be on hand at the hour appointed, and then he and Tom went into the dressing-room to put on their gymnastic suits, while Duncan hurried away to carry out an idea of his own that had suddenly suggested itself to him.

CHAPTER VI.

CONY RYAN'S PANCAKES.

“**H**E did bite, didn’t he?” said Duncan to himself, as he hurried about the grounds and through the academy building looking everywhere for Dick Henderson. “He jumped at the bait quicker than I thought he would ; but he never would have done it if he had not got himself into trouble last night. That made him mad, and now he don’t much care what he does. We’ll fix him. A court-martial and extra lessons and guard duty and drills for a whole month will so disgust him with this school that he will clear out, and we shall be well rid of him.”

Duncan soon found the boy of whom he was in search, and the following is a part of the conversation that took place between them :

“You are on post No. 5, down there at the north side of the grounds to-night, are you not?” said Duncan.

Dick replied that he was, that he went on at midnight.

"Well, you know that the boys are going down to Cony Ryan's to-night, don't you?" continued Clarence.

Yes, Dick knew all about it, and stood ready to help them in every way he could, without getting himself into trouble.

"Well," said Duncan, again, "Don Gordon is going with us."

Dick seemed delighted to hear it.

"We roped him in just as easy as falling off a log," Clarence went on. "He has been introduced to some of the fellows, and Fisher and I have worked things so nicely that he doesn't suspect anything. Now you must be on the alert to catch him when we come back, which will be some time between one and four o'clock."

"How shall I know him from the rest of you?"

"By the signal, of course. Have you forgotten that?" Here Duncan coughed slightly, and in a peculiar manner.

"No, I haven't forgotten it. I only want to

know just how things are going to be managed, so that I shall not make any mistakes. It would be awkward, you know, if I should call the corporal of the guard to arrest the wrong fellow."

"You musn't do that," said Duncan, quickly. "It would be much better to let Gordon pass unchallenged with the rest of us. You know we boys got ourselves into lots of trouble last term, and if we don't keep our names off the black-list from this time on, we stand a good chance of being sent down."

(By being "sent down" Duncan meant "expelled.")

"All right," said Dick. "I know just what you want of me. Do everything just as it was done last term, and I will see that our boys get safely through, and that Don Gordon comes in for a court-martial."

When the hour for dress-parade arrived the classes were marched to the drill-room by their respective captains, three of them being drawn up in line, while the Plebes were stationed at one end of the room so that they could watch the movements of their comrades, and learn some-

thing of the duties that would be required of them when they were well enough drilled in the manual of arms and school of the company to go on parade themselves. There were two of them who did not pay much attention to the proceedings, although they appeared to watch them closely, and they were Don and Bert Gordon. They noticed that the adjutant carried some papers in his belt, and they knew instinctively that one of them contained something that would prove to be of interest to them.

In obedience to the adjutant's order, the captains brought their companies to "parade rest," the band "sounded off," a few exercises in the manual of arms were gone through with, and then came the command: "Attention to orders." Don listened, and heard his name and Bert's read off in connection with those of three or four other culprits, who were ordered to be punished according to their deserts. It was ordered that privates Donald and Hubert Gordon, for overstaying their time, and having a light burning in their quarters after taps (this being their second offence), be deprived of liberty for thirty days, and required to stand guard for four hours on the

ensuing Saturday afternoon with packed knapsacks. Then the parade was dismissed, the band struck up a lively tune, the officers advanced to salute the commander of the battalion, and the first sergeants marched their companies to the armory, where ranks were broken.

"Didn't I tell you just how it would be?" whispered Fisher, who happened to overtake Don while the latter was on his way to his room. "It's no trouble at all to stand an extra, for it is over with in four hours; and as for depriving you of your liberty—that's all in my one eye. You can see much more fun without a pass than you can with one, for you are not obliged to return at any specified time."

"I don't mind the punishment as much as I do the disgrace," said Don.

"Disgrace!" echoed Fisher. "Nonsense. This has been a military school for half a century or more, and of the thousands of students who have been graduated here, there are not a hundred who did not, at some time or another, break some rule, and get punished for it. Why, my own father used to run the guard."

"So did mine," said Don.

"*Your* father!" exclaimed Tom, in great surprise. "Did he ever attend this school?"

"Yes; he received a military education and prepared for college here."

"I am surprised to hear it. Well, he didn't get through the whole course without being hauled up occasionally, did he? I just know he didn't, if he was a boy who had any spirit in him. Now, as I may not see you again until the time for action arrives, I want to know if you understand just what you have to do."

Don answered that he was sure he did, and then went on to repeat the instructions he had received in the gymnasium. When he had finished, Fisher gave him an approving wink and nod, and left him.

During the evening Don and Bert did very little studying. The latter took his punishment very much to heart, and asked himself over and over what his mother would think when she heard of it; while Don was so busy thinking of the festivities that were to come off at Cony Ryan's, that he could not have concentrated his mind on his books if he had tried. When taps were sounded the light went out instantly.

"I shall never get into trouble for *that* again," said Don, as he tumbled into bed, after bidding his brother good-night. "The next time I am reported, it will be for something that is worth reporting."

Don began to be excited now. He had been instructed to wait twenty minutes, as near as he could guess at it, in order to give the officer of the day time to make his rounds, which he did as often as the huge bell in the cupola tolled the hours. He knew when the officer ascended the stairs, heard him talking with the sentry who had charge of that floor, and breathed easier when he went down again—but only for a moment, for now something that appeared to be an insurmountable obstacle arose before him all on a sudden. The sensitive Bert was sadly troubled, and when he got that way, it was almost impossible for him to go to sleep. In case he remained awake until the expiration of the twenty minutes, what could Don do?

"I never thought of that," soliloquized the latter, his ears telling him the while that Bert was tossing restlessly about on his bed. "It would be simply impossible for me to get up

and dress and slip out of the room without his knowledge. Of course I might go out openly and above board, for I know that he would never blow on me ; but if I do that, he will improve every opportunity to lecture me, and I would rather spend every Saturday afternoon in walking extras than listen to him. I ought to have told the fellows to allow me at least an hour."

While Don was busy with such reflections as these, and trying in vain to conjure up some plan for leaving the room without attracting his brother's attention, he was electrified by a gentle snore which came from the direction of Bert's bed. Don thought it was a pleasant sound to hear just then, for it told him that the way was clear. In an instant he was out on the floor, and in five minutes more he was dressed. After wrapping one of his pillows up in the quilts and arranging them as well as he could in the dark, so that they would bear some resemblance to a human figure, he walked across the room with noiseless steps and cautiously opened the door. The hall was lighted up by a single gas-burner, under which the sentry, Charley Porter, sat reading a book. He looked up when he heard Don's door grating

on its hinges ; but he did not look Don's way. He turned his eyes in the other direction. Then he laid down his book, got upon his feet, and walking leisurely along the hall with his hands behind his back, took his stand in front of a window, and looked out into the darkness. His back was turned toward Don, who closed the door of his room behind him, moved along the hall on tip-toe, and dodging around an angle in the wall, was quickly out of sight. A few hurried steps brought him to another door, which yielded to his touch, and then Don found himself in utter darkness.

This door gave access to the back stairs, which ran from the ground floor to the upper story of the building, and were intended to be used only as a fire-escape. The doors that opened into it—there was one on each floor—were kept locked, and all the keys that rightfully belonged to them were hung up on a nail in the superintendent's room, where they could be readily found by the teachers in case circumstances required that they should be brought into use. The superintendent was happy in the belief that by placing a sentry in charge of the dormitories on each floor, and keeping the keys of these doors under his eye all

the time, he had put it out of the power of any student to leave the building during the night ; but he had not taken into consideration the fact that sentries may sometimes prove false to their duty, and that an old rusty key, picked up in the yard, can, by the aid of a file and a little ingenuity, be made to fit almost any lock. Tom Fisher and his friends all had keys that would open these doors, and Don had resolved that he would have one too.

“ B-l-e-r-s,” whispered Don, as he stepped out into the fire-escape.

“ R-a-m,” came the response, in the same low whisper.

The pass-word of the band of worthies to which Don now belonged was “ Ramblers.” Of course it was used only in the dark, or when the members could not see each other. If a boy desired to know whether or not a student whom he suddenly encountered in some out-of-the-way place was a friend, all he had to do was to spell the last syllable of the pass-word, as Don had done ; and if he received the same answer that Don did, he knew at once that he had found some one who could be depended on. At least that was what

Fisher and Duncan told Don; but the reader already knows that they did not tell him the truth.

"Who is it?" whispered Don.

"Fisher," replied the owner of that name; and as he spoke he stepped forward to lock the door.

"Hadn't you better leave it unfastened?" asked Don.

"Not by a great sight," answered Fisher, quickly. "The officer of the day and the corporal on duty try all these doors every time they make their rounds, and if they should happen to find one of them unlocked, good-by to all our hopes of eating pies and pancakes at Cony Ryan's again this winter."

"Then how can I get back to my room?"

"Why, I shall be here to open the door for you."

"But we might get separated, you know."

"Oh, no we won't," answered Tom, confidently. "Don't you be at all uneasy on that score. Duncan and I will stand by you. Come on, now; the boys are all ready and waiting."

"How fearful dark it is," said Don. "I can't see my hand before me."

“Neither can I ; but I have been through here so often that I know every step of the way. Give me your hand.”

Fisher took Don in tow and succeeded in conducting him safely down two flights of stairs—it afterward proved to be a fortunate thing for Don that he remembered that—and out into the yard where Duncan and the rest were waiting for them. After greeting Don in the most cordial manner they moved off in a body toward the north corner of the grounds—all except Tom Fisher, who went on ahead to notify the sentry of their approach. This he did in some mysterious way, and without alarming any of the guards on the neighboring posts ; and the boy, who ought to have called the corporal of the guard at once, went into his box and stayed there until Tom and his companions had crossed his beat and were out of sight. They easily found the place where two of the tall fence pickets had been loosened at the bottom, and pushing these aside they crept through the opening into the road.

“Well, Gordon, that wasn’t such a very hard thing to do, was it ? ” said Duncan, as he took off his overcoat and shook the snow out of it.

"No," answered Don, "and I don't see much fun in it, either. It is not a very smart thing to crawl by a sentry who is accommodating enough to keep out of sight until you have had time to get out of harm's way. There's no excitement in it—anybody could do it. If that guard had been faithful to his trust, I should think we had done something worth bragging about."

"O, you want excitement, do you?" exclaimed Duncan. "You want a chance to run by some spooney who would be only too glad to report you and get you into a row, don't you? All right. We'll see that you get the chance, and very shortly, too; won't we, boys?"

"Yes," replied all the boys, in concert.

"And, unless I am very badly mistaken, you will see quite as much excitement as you want to-night," added Duncan, to himself. "If Dick Henderson does his duty, you will be under arrest and a candidate for a court-martial before you see the inside of your dormitory again."

During the walk to the big pond, near which Cony Ryan's house stood, Don's new friends entertained him with many thrilling stories of the deeds of daring that had been performed by themselves

and former students, such as running the guard when all the posts were occupied by those who were not friendly to them ; stealing the bell-rope when the cupola was guarded by some of the best soldiers in the academy ; turning the bell upside down on a cold night, filling it with water and allowing it to freeze solid ; and spiking the gun whose unwelcome booming aroused them at so early an hour every morning. As Don listened he began to grow excited ; and when there was a little lull in the conversation, he proposed one or two daring schemes of his own that had suddenly occurred to him, and which were so far ahead of any his auditors had ever engaged in, that they could hardly believe he was in earnest.

“Gordon, you see around you a lot of fellows who never have and never will back down from any reasonable undertaking,” said Tom Fisher. “But the idea of stealing a cow, taking her into the grounds and hoisting her up to the top of the belfry, overpowering and binding every sentry who stands in our way—Great Cæsar’s ghost ! Gordon, you must be taking leave of your senses.”

“And as for taking the butcher’s big bull-dog up to the top story of the building, tying a tin can

to his tail, and starting him on a run down four pairs of stairs and through the halls—that's another thing I don't approve of," said Duncan.

"I guess not," said another of the fellows. "I wouldn't touch that dog for a million dollars. We are in for anything new that promises to be either interesting or exciting, but, as Tom says, it must be something reasonable. Think up some other plans."

The boys had by this time reached Cony Ryan's house. Led by Tom Fisher they mounted the steps, and passing through a narrow hall entered a neatly furnished little parlor whose walls, could they have found tongues, would have told some strange and amusing stories of the scenes that had been enacted there. It was brilliantly lighted, and a cheerful fire burned in the grate.

"This looks as though Cony was expecting us, doesn't it?" said Tom, gazing about the room with a smile of satisfaction. "Take off your overcoat, Gordon, and sit down. Make yourself at home."

"Do you know," added Duncan, "that this house was built and furnished with the money that the academy boys have put into Cony's

pocket? Years ago, when he was nothing but a poor fisherman and lived down there on the bank of the river in a little shanty about half the size of this room, it occurred to him that he might turn an honest penny by supplying the students with milk and pies. He drove a thriving trade until some of the teachers began to suspect that he was putting something stronger than water in his milk, and then they shut down on him and he was forbidden to enter the grounds. But that didn't trouble him any. The boys had got in the habit of spending their extra dimes with him, and since he couldn't come to them any more, they fell into the way of going to him. Why, Gordon, if you could look over some of his old registers, you would find in them the names of men who are known all over the land."

Just then a side door opened, admitting a portly, white-bearded old fellow, dressed in a modest suit of black, who was greeted by the students in the most uproarious manner. They crowded around him, all trying to shake his hands at the same time, while Cony, for it was he, beamed benevolently upon them over his spectacles. This was the first time he had

seen any of them since the close of the last school term.

"You see we are all on hand again, Cony," said Duncan, when the greetings were over. "And if you will trot out a few plates of your pancakes, you will find that we are as hungry as ever. By the way, did you know a boy of the name of Gordon who used to attend this academy?"

"Gordon of Mississippi?" exclaimed Cony, who, having a retentive memory, never forgot the names of any of his patrons. "I should say so. He has spent many a pleasant evening in this room."

"Well, here is one of his boys," continued Duncan. "Mr. Ryan, Mr. Donald Gordon."

The old fellow was very much surprised.

"It doesn't seem possible," said he, as he shook Don's hand and gave him a good looking over. "He is the very image of his father, who was one of the finest-looking young soldiers I ever put my eyes on. Mercy on us, how time does fly!"

"Say, Cony," said Tom Fisher, coaxingly, "can't we have just one game of 'sell out,' to-night?"

"No, sir," was the emphatic reply. "You can have all the pancakes you want, and as much sweet milk or buttermilk as you can hold, but you don't turn a card in this house. It is bad enough for you to run the guard, and if I did my duty, I should report the last one of you in the morning."

"Suppose you trot out the pancakes and milk, and let somebody else report us," suggested Don.

"Yes ; that's the idea," cried the others, with one voice.

Don thought he enjoyed himself that night, and his companions thought so, too, for he sang as many songs, told as many stories, and laughed as heartily as any of them. He listened with much interest while Cony told of the exploits of the students he had known in the years gone by, and who had since made themselves famous as lawyers, legislators and soldiers, and was greatly astonished when Tom Fisher jumped to his feet with his watch in his hand and a look of alarm on his face.

"Fellows," said he, "where has the night gone? It is half-past three, and we have just

half an hour in which to crawl by Dick Henderson's post and get into bed. If we are two minutes behind time we are a gone community."

This startling announcement broke up the party at once. The boys made a simultaneous rush for their overcoats and caps, and after Don had settled their bill—a proceeding on his part that raised him to a high place in the estimation of some of the students whose parents did not think it best to give them a very liberal allowance of spending money—they dashed out of the house and started for the academy on a dead run, Duncan and Don Gordon bringing up the rear. If the latter had known what the boy who kept so close to his elbow was thinking about, he would have thrown him headlong into the nearest snow-drift.

CHAPTER VII.

RUNNING THE GUARD.

“NOW, boys,” said Tom Fisher, “one at a time, but remember lively is the word. Gordon, you had better stay back and watch the rest of us, and then you will know how to proceed when your turn comes. We are not afraid of Henderson, but still we don’t want to show ourselves to him too plainly, for fear that the corporal of the guard or the officer of the day may be loafing around somewhere within sight of his post.”

They had now reached the academy grounds, and half the time at their disposal had already been consumed. They had barely fifteen minutes left, and haste was necessary. As matters stood, all the floors and one of the outside beats were in charge of boys who had been duly posted, and would permit them to pass unchallenged; but these accommodating guards would very soon be relieved, and their places taken by those who

would report them the first thing in the morning.

As Fisher spoke he pushed aside the loosened fence-pickets, squeezed himself through the opening, and, with his body half bent, made his way toward Dick Henderson's post. Presently he threw himself upon his hands and knees, and in a few seconds more was out of sight. Another and another followed him, and finally Duncan took his turn, and Don was left alone.

"Don't be in too great a hurry," were the latter's parting words. "Let me get out of your sight before you start."

During the last hour and a half Dick Henderson had been walking his beat in no very pleasant frame of mind. Tom had told him that he and his friends would return some time between the hours of two and four; but at three o'clock Dick had seen no signs of them.

"I wonder if they went in at some other part of the grounds," Dick often said to himself. "I can't believe they did, for I think I am the only fellow in our crowd who holds an outside post to-night. Besides, Duncan said they would come in here, so that I could halt Don Gordon. They'll

have to hurry up if they want me to do anything for them."

As the minutes wore away Dick's anxiety increased, and finally he became really alarmed. The bell had struck three long ago, and Dick was beginning to look for his relief, when, to his great joy, he saw somebody creeping toward him through the deep snow. As soon as he caught sight of him he moved back to his box and stood behind it, leaning on his musket. The boy, Tom Fisher, crossed Dick's beat in plain view of him, uttering a peculiar cough as he passed, and disappeared behind the high piles of snow that had been thrown out of the path leading to the academy.

"That's one," thought Dick, "and Duncan said there were to be nine in the party. I am to allow eight of them to go in peace, and the ninth man, who will be Don Gordon, is to be halted and turned over to the tender mercies of the officer of the day. That is two," he added, as another boy crept by, giving the "signal" as he went.

When the eighth man was safely out of sight Dick shouldered his musket and stepping out from behind his box, prepared for action. As he came

into view, a boy who was moving rapidly toward him, in a crouching attitude, suddenly stopped, and then as suddenly plunged into the nearest snowdrift, burying himself in it head and ears.

"That fellow is like an ostrich," soliloquized Dick, as he walked quickly along his beat. "He thinks that because his head is out of sight, his whole body is concealed."

Having taken up a position between the recumbent figure and the path that led from his beat to the academy, Dick brought his musket to "arms port" and sung out, in his loudest tones: "Who comes there?" immediately following up his challenge with lusty calls for the corporal of the guard No. 5. The last words had hardly left his lips when the prostrate boy sprang to his feet, and coughing up the snow which had filled his mouth and got into his throat when he made his sudden plunge into the drift, ran toward the academy with surprising swiftness. Dick heard that cough, and it affected him very strangely. He stood with open mouth and eyes, gazing in the direction in which the boy had disappeared, while his musket trembled in his grasp, and his

face grew almost as white as the snow around him.

“Now I’ve done it,” he said to himself, with no little alarm. “I’ve gone and called the corporal for one of our own boys. What in the world shall I do? Tom and Clarence will read me out of their good books, and I shall have no one to be friends with, for those high-toned lads in the upper classes won’t look at me. Well, if trouble comes of it, they can just blame Duncan. He told me to stop the ninth boy, and I know I didn’t make any mistake in counting them. But what shall I say to the corporal? That’s what bothers me.”

Dick was obliged to come to a decision on this point very speedily, for just then the door of the guard-room was thrown open, and the corporal came out and hurried toward him.

“What’s the matter, sentry?” he asked, as soon as he had approached within speaking distance.

“Some fellow has just run by me,” was Dick’s reply.

“Whew!” whistled the corporal. “Running the guard has begun rather early in the term, hasn’t it? Who was he?”

"I don't know," answered Dick, and he told the truth.

"Whom did he look like?"

"I don't know that, either. You can't tell one student from another in the dark, when they are all dressed alike."

"Then why didn't you catch him and find out who he was?"

"Catch him!" repeated Dick. "Cony Ryan's grayhound couldn't have caught him. He ran like a deer."

"Well, he'll be stopped when he tries to get into his dormitory," said the corporal, indifferently. "I'll go and see what the officer of the day thinks about it. You're sure this fellow, whoever he was, didn't go out since you have been on post?"

"Of course he didn't," said Dick, indignantly.

"Then Patchen" (that was the name of the sentry who held post No. 5 when Fisher and his companions left the grounds), "will have to answer to the superintendent for neglect of duty," said the corporal, as he turned on his heel and walked back toward the guard-room.

"And just as likely as not he will punch my

head for getting him into trouble," thought Dick, trembling again. "But I didn't mean to do it. It's all that Clarence Duncan's fault, for he ought to have told me that he was going to add more boys to his party. Don Gordon must be outside the grounds yet, and perhaps some of our boys are with him."

Meanwhile Tom Fisher, having gained the academy building in safety, opened the back door, climbed two pairs of stairs, and felt his way along the hall to the door that gave entrance to the floor on which Don Gordon's dormitory was situated. This door he unlocked and opened, and stepping into the next hall saw the sentry who had relieved Charley Porter at midnight sitting under the light reading a book.

"Ahem!" said Tom; whereupon the sentry laid down his book and walked toward him.

"Well, you fellows have made a night of it, haven't you?" said he, in a cautious whisper.

"I should think so," answered Tom. "Had a splendid time, too. The pancakes were just as good as they used to be, and Gordon settled the bill like a prince."

"You had better go to bed, and be in a

hurry about it, too," said the sentry. "It is almost time for me to be relieved."

"I know it; but I promised to wait at this door and let Gordon in. He has no key of his own."

"If he doesn't come along pretty soon he'll not get in *this* morning without being reported, for Gulick comes after me."

"Is that so?" Then he'd better hurry, that's a fact. I can't wait much longer for him without bringing myself into trouble."

The sentry, who did not dare remain longer in conversation with Tom for fear that the officer of the day or the corporal of the guard might come quietly up the stairs and catch him at it, walked away toward the other end of the hall, while Tom closed the door and stood there in the dark, impatiently awaiting the arrival of Don Gordon. He heard his friends as they crossed the landing one after another, and went on up to their dormitories, but the boy he wanted to see did not make his appearance. Presently some one jerked open the back door, slammed it behind him, and came up the stairs in great haste.

"Who is that idiot, I wonder? He makes noise enough to arouse the whole school. B-l-e-r-s," whispered Tom, as the boy sprang upon the landing.

"R-a-m," came the prompt response.

"Who is it?" continued Tom.

"Brown."

"Well you are making a fearful racket, the first thing you know," said Tom, angrily.

"I am in a hurry," panted the boy. "Here's the very mischief to pay. That fool Henderson has gone and challenged one of our fellows."

"No," gasped Tom, who was greatly alarmed.

"But I say he has, for I heard him. Come on. We musn't stay here another moment."

"But I promised to let Gordon in," said Tom.

"What do you care for Gordon? Let him go and take care of yourself. That's what I am going to do."

So saying the boy went on up the stairs, leaving Tom to himself. The latter could not make up his mind what to do. He knew that he was in danger, but still he did not like to desert Don in his extremity. Don, speaking in school-boy parlance, had shown himself to be a thorough-

bred. He could sing a good song, tell an interesting story, and, better than all, he was provided with a liberal supply of pocket-money, which he spent with a lavish hand. This was enough to raise him to a high place in the estimation of Tom Fisher, whose own supply of dimes was limited.

"I have it?" soliloquized Tom, at length. "I'll leave the key in the lock, and if he succeeds in getting by the guard he can let himself in. Of course he will have sense enough to fasten the door after him, and put the key in his pocket. Henderson will have to explain his conduct in the morning. He had no business to halt any of our fellows unless he did it to protect himself."

Tom hurriedly ascended the next flight of stairs, but scarcely had he reached the top when the back door was thrown open again and another boy came bounding up the steps. It was Clarence Duncan, who was congratulating himself on the complete success of his plans. He lingered a moment or two in the hall where Fisher had stood waiting for Don Gordon, and then went on to his own dormitory. The floor-guard was so

very deeply interested in a dime novel that he did not appear to see or hear him as he passed, and in a few seconds more Clarence was safe in bed. He was just in time. He had not been between the sheets two minutes before he heard the gruff tones of the officer of the day, who was questioning the floor-guard. Clarence could not hear what they said, but he knew what they were talking about. Presently he heard doors softly opened and closed. The sounds came nearer, and at last the door of his own room was opened, and the officer of the day, attended by the corporal of the guard, who carried a lantern in his hand, stepped across the threshold. The officer saw Duncan and Fisher lying with their faces to the wall, apparently fast asleep, took note of the fact that their clothes were deposited in orderly array upon the chairs at the side of their beds, and departed satisfied with his investigations. In a few minutes the relief came up, and Clarence began to breathe easier.

“Say, Fisher,” he whispered, “are you asleep?”

“No,” was the reply. “And what’s more, I don’t want to go to sleep. If I do, I am afraid I shall miss roll-call, and then the superinten-

dent would know where to look to find at least one fellow who ran the guards."

"I think myself that it would be a good plan for us to keep awake. Say, Fisher," whispered Clarence, again, "Gordon's goose is cooked."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean just what I say. I shall be amply revenged on him for the insults he has heaped upon us. When we came through the fence I managed to keep him until the last, and Henderson halted him. I didn't know but he might succeed in getting by in spite of Dick's efforts to stop him, so, in order to make assurance doubly sure, I took the pains to examine the door in the second hall, and in it I found a key that some kind friend had left there for his benefit. But I just took the key out of that lock, and put it into my pocket. Don can't possibly get in without being reported by the floor-guard, and he can take his choice between freezing outside and giving himself up to the corporal."

"Did you tell Henderson to halt him?" demanded Fisher, who had listened with the

greatest amazement to this astounding revelation.

"Yes, sir, I did," chuckled Duncan, who seemed to be highly elated. "I posted Dick yesterday afternoon, and he carried out my idea to a dot. I didn't expect to get even with Gordon so soon, did you?"

"Well, of all the blunder-heads I ever saw you are the greatest," said Tom, in deep disgust.

"Why, what's the matter?" demanded Duncan, who was now surprised in his turn. "What are you going to do?" he added, as Tom got out of his bed and moved toward the door.

"I am going to see if there is any chance for me to undo your miserable work," replied Tom, who was so enraged that he could scarcely speak. "You have made a nice mess by your meddling. Why didn't you ask the advice of the rest of us before issuing any orders on your own responsibility? You're just a trifle too smart to be of any use to me hereafter."

Opening the door Tom looked out into the hall, and saw at a glance that he could do nothing to help the unlucky Don. He had intended, if it

were possible, to go down to the lower floor and put the key back in the lock so that Don could use it in case he succeeded by any chance in getting past the sentry ; but he could not carry this plan into execution now, because the floor-guard who had permitted himself and Duncan and all the other boys who belonged on that floor to pass unnoticed, had been relieved, and his chair was occupied by a boy who could not be fooled with.

"Anything wanting, Fisher?" asked the sentry, looking up from his book.

"I thought somebody came into my room a few minutes ago," said Tom, in reply.

"So there did. It was the officer of the day."

"What did he want?"

"Not much of anything, only to make sure that you were in bed where you belong."

"What's up?"

"Somebody has been running the guard ; that's all."

"Did they catch him?"

"No ; and neither did Henderson recognize him. There's something mysterious about it. As far as I can learn there is no one missing, and

the floor-guards are all willing to swear that nobody has passed in or out of the academy since taps. Good-morning."

As this was a hint that the sentry did not want to talk any longer, Tom drew in his head and closed the door.

"Now I *am* beat," said he, aloud ; and so was Duncan who had sat up in bed and heard every word that passed between his room-mate and the sentry. "Gordon was stopped by Dick Henderson, locked out in the cold through your lack of sense, and yet the officer of the day finds him in his room ! How does that come ? I can't understand it."

"Neither can I," said Duncan. "But, Tom, what made you get so angry at me ?"

"I had two reasons for it. In the first place you had no right to tell Henderson to stop Don until you found out what the rest of us thought about it. You took altogether too much upon yourself when you presumed to act for a dozen or more fellows in the way you did."

"Have you forgotten that Gordon has repeatedly neglected to salute us, and that he threatened to make spread-eagles of the pair of us ?"

demanded Clarence. "I wanted to get even with him for that."

"That's no excuse. I want to get even with him too, and, what is more, I intend to do it; but I never would have given my consent to your idea, as you call it. While we were coming from Cony's I made up my mind that I would propose to the boys to take Gordon into full fellowship with us and stand by him through thick and thin until near the close of the term; and when we had enjoyed all the treats we could squeeze out of him, *then* we'd go for him. He's got a lot of money, and, what's more to the point, he is perfectly willing to spend it."

"That's so," said Duncan, thoughtfully. "Your idea is better than mine. Why didn't you speak of it before?"

"I should have thought your own good sense, if you had any, would have suggested it to you," answered Tom. "I have been thinking about it ever since we left Cony's. Your governor and mine have curtailed our allowance, and unless somebody foots the bills for us, how are we going to get any pancakes this term? Besides, we may want to borrow a dollar occasionally, and I know

Gordon will give it to us if we only handle him right."

"That's so," said Duncan, again. "I wish I had kept away from Henderson."

"So do I. We may see trouble over that thing yet. I wish it was morning. I shall be on nettles until I see Don in the ranks. I hope he will get in all right, but somehow I can't bring myself to believe that he will."

The two boys did not sleep a wink that night—or morning, rather. They rolled and tossed about on their beds, waiting impatiently for the report of the morning gun which finally rang out on the frosty air, being followed almost immediately by the rattle of drums and the shrieking of fifes in the drill-room. They marched down with their company, and while the roll was being called they ran their eyes over the Plebes who were drawn up at the farther end of the room. There was Don Gordon in the front rank, looking as fresh as a daisy and as innocent as though he had never violated a rule in his life.

"He did get in, didn't he?" said Duncan, while he and Fisher were clearing up their room in readiness for inspection. "He didn't seem any

the worse for his night's experience, either ; but did you notice Dick Henderson ? His face was as long as your arm."

Having received positive proof that Don had succeeded in reaching his room in spite of the fact that the hall-door had been locked against him, Tom and his companion, their friendly relations having been fully restored by the unexpected and mysterious failure of Duncan's "idea," became anxious to know how he had done it. During the two hours of study that came after the inspection of their rooms, they did not look at their books.

As soon as breakfast was over and the ranks were broken, they put on their overcoats and went out in search of Don. They found him in a very few minutes, for he was also looking for them. He was just as anxious to know why he had been challenged while the other members of the party were allowed to pass, as they were to ascertain how he had got back to his room. Before any of the three could speak, Dick Henderson came rushing up.

"O, boys !" he began.

"That will do for the present, Bub," interrupted Duncan.

"Run away now, like a good little boy."

"But I say, fellows," exclaimed Dick.

"Well, say it some other time. We are busy just now."

"Let him speak," said Don. "I want him to tell why he stopped me this morning."

"I didn't stop you," replied Dick.

"That's a fact, you didn't. But you tried to all the same, and I want to know what you meant by it."

"Why, Gordon, it can't be possible that you were—eh?"

Dick was about to ask Don if he was the boy who tried to bury himself out of sight in a snow-drift, and who jumped up and ran toward the academy when the corporal of the guard was summoned; but he was interrupted by a look from Duncan. Then the latter pointed with his thumb over his shoulder, and Dick, who understood the motion, beat a hasty retreat, looking crestfallen as well as bewildered.

"He committed a most inexcusable blunder, and came very near getting the whole of us into hot water," said Fisher, who knew that he must offer something in the way of explanation. "We

will give him a good talking to, and make him promise to be more careful in future. Now, Gordon, how in the world did you get in?"

"Easy enough," answered Don. "I say, boys, there's lots of fun in running the guard, and some little excitement too. I am ready to try it again any night. Come on, and I will tell you all about it."

The three boys linked their arms together and walked toward an unfrequented part of the grounds, so that Don could give the details of his exploit without danger of being overheard. We will tell the story in our own way.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW DON GOT IN.

“DON’T be in too great a hurry. Let me get out of your sight,” said Clarence Duncan, as he crept through the fence ; and Don, whose suspicions had not been aroused, was careful to obey. When he thought that Clarence had been allowed time to reach the academy, he passed through the opening and moved toward Dick Henderson’s post. He saw the latter when he came out from behind his box and walked along his beat, and remembering Tom Fisher’s words of caution—that it would not be safe to approach Dick’s post openly for fear that the officer of the day or the corporal might be somewhere within sight—Don sought concealment by throwing himself at full length in the snow. He expected to see Dick turn about and go behind his box again ; and consequently he was not a little amazed when the sentry took up a position directly in front of him, and called for the corporal of the guard.

Don did not know what to make of it ; but he *did* know that if he stayed where he was, detection and punishment were inevitable. He still had one chance for escape, and he lost no time in improving it. He jumped up and took to his heels, trusting to the darkness and to his uniform to conceal his identity. He was very light of foot, and by doing some of his best running, he succeeded in dodging around the corner of the academy building just as the corporal threw open the door of the guard-room. The signal, which had produced such an effect upon Dick Henderson, he had given by the merest accident. It was one that Fisher, by some oversight, had neglected to teach him, although he had let him into the secret of all the other signs and pass-words.

"A miss is as good as a mile, but still that was a pretty close shave," said Don to himself, as he opened the back door and felt his way up the stairs. "I can't understand why Dick challenged me, unless it was because my approach was discovered by somebody else who would have reported him if he hadn't tried to stop me."

On reaching the second landing Don moved cautiously along the hall, spelling the last syllable

of the pass-word as he went. Greatly to his surprise, he met with no response. When his hands came in contact with the door, he began searching for the knob; but when he turned it, the door did not open for him. It was locked.

“Now here’s a go,” thought Don, who did not know whether to laugh or get angry over the predicament in which he so unexpectedly found himself. “Where’s Fisher? He knew very well that I couldn’t get to my room without assistance, and yet he has deserted me. If that is the sort of fellow he is, he’ll not eat any more pancakes this winter at my expense.”

Having satisfied himself that Tom was not on hand, as he had promised to be, Don placed his ear close to the key-hole, and found that he could distinctly hear the footsteps of the floor-guard, as he paced up and down the hall on the other side of the door. There was a fellow who could and would help him if he could only attract his attention. Waiting, with all the patience he could command, until the sentry came down to that end of the hall again, Don rapped softly upon the door, and in a peculiar manner. The footsteps ceased on the instant; the sentry was listening.

Again Don gave the mystic signal—one quick rap; then, after a little pause, three more raps, delivered in rapid succession, and presently a voice came through the key-hole.

“B-l-e-r-s!” it whispered.

“R-a-m!” whispered Don, in reply.

“Who is it?”

“Gordon.”

A moment later a key rattled in the lock, the door swung open, and Don stood face to face with the sentry.

“Where’s Fisher?” demanded the latter.

“That’s just what I should like to know,” answered Don. “He said he would be here to let me in, but I haven’t seen anything of him.”

“He’s a pretty fellow,” exclaimed the sentry. “I don’t know whether you can reach your room or not. The guards have been aroused, and I am expecting the officer of the day every minute. But I’ll do the best I can for you. Stay here till I come back.”

The sentry was not gone more than a quarter of a minute. He went as far as the head of the stairs that led to the floor below, and then he turned and ran back on tip-toe. “You’re too

late," said he. "The officer of the day is down stairs, and he'll be up here in a second. You might as well come out and give yourself up, for the boy who comes after me will not pass you."

"I can't help that," replied Don, "I'll not give myself up. That isn't my style."

The sentry had seen many a boy in a tight corner, but he had never before seen one who took matters as coolly as Don did. All the other students of his acquaintance would have been frightened when they found that every avenue of escape was closed against them; but Don was as serene as a summer's morning.

"You're a plucky one," said the sentry, "and I am sorry that I can not help you. If my relief—Get out of sight, quick! *quick!*" he added, as a heavy step sounded on the stairs. "That's the officer of the day; and if he finds this door unlocked, I shall be in as bad a box as you are."

Don went back into the hall, his movements being quickened by a gentle push from the sentry, who, having closed and locked the door, succeeded in reaching his own hall just a second

before the officer of the day appeared at the head of the stairs. Close at his heels came the corporal of the guard, who carried a lighted lantern in his hand.

"Sentry," said the officer, "have any of your men left their rooms to-night?"

"Not since I have been on post, sir," replied the sentry. "The beds were all occupied half an hour ago."

"We will look into this matter, corporal," said the officer; and as he spoke he led the way to the farther end of the hall to begin an examination of the rooms. The sentry knew that he would do this, and he awaited the issue of events with no little uneasiness.

"Somebody is in for a regular overhauling," said he to himself. "Of course they will see that Gordon's bed is empty, and the next question to be decided will be: Who let him out, Porter or I? I know I didn't do it; Porter will be sure to deny it—he can keep a smooth face and tell a lie easier than any boy *I* ever saw—and unless I can prevail upon Gordon to back up my statement, I shall be in a bad fix."

This was the sentry's only chance for escape,

and it looked like a very slim one. He was not at all acquainted with Don Gordon; in fact he had never exchanged a word with him until that night, and consequently he had no idea what Don would do when he was taken before the superintendent and ordered to give the names of the floor-guard and of the outside sentry who had permitted him to pass unchallenged. Would he refuse to obey the order, as an honorable boy ought to do, or would he seek to screen himself by making a clean breast of everything? While the sentry was turning these matters over in his mind, the officer of the day opened the door of Don's dormitory.

"It's all over now," thought he, "and the next thing is the investigation. I don't believe I shall have another opportunity to speak to Gordon to-night, for my relief ought to be along now; but I must see him the first thing in the morning and find out what sort of a story he intends to tell when he is hauled up. If he has nerve enough to keep a still tongue in his head——"

The sentry brought his soliloquy to a close, and stood looking the very picture of astonish-

ment. Just then the officer of the day and his attendant came out of Don's room, and there was nothing in their faces to indicate that they had made any discovery there. They looked into all the other dormitories, and then came back to the lower end of the hall and tried the door that led to the fire-escape. It was locked, and everything seemed to be all right.

"Sentry," said the officer of the day, in stern tones. "Are you sure you are telling me the truth when you say that no one has passed you to-night?"

"Yes, sir, I am," answered the boy, looking his questioner squarely in the eye. "No one has passed across this floor since I came on post."

"When this matter has been sifted to the bottom, as it certainly will be, a fine reckoning awaits somebody," said the officer. "Corporal, we will go to the next floor."

When the two had disappeared, and the sentry's ears told him that they were making the round of the dormitories above, he pulled his key from his pocket and quickly opened the door behind which

Don Gordon stood trying to make up his mind to something. He did not expect to get into his room that morning, and the question he was trying to decide, was: Should he stay there in the cold and take his chances of falling-in with the rest of the Plebes when they were marched down to the drill-room to answer to roll-call, or should he give himself up and ask permission to sit by the guard-room stove until he was thawed out? He was very much surprised when the door opened, and he saw the sentry beckoning to him.

“Gordon,” said the latter, in a hurried whisper. “You’re safe. Did you put a dummy in your bed before you came out?”

Don replied that he did.

“Well, it must be a perfect one, for the officer of the day went in there with a light and never saw anything to excite his suspicions. It’s the greatest wonder in the world to me that he didn’t miss your clothes.”

“My clothes were there,” answered Don, calmly. “I took my dress suit out of the closet and put it on a chair by the side of my bed, turning the coat inside out and doubling up the skirts of it so that it would look like a fatigue

coat. What did the old fellow have to say about it, anyhow?"

The sentry could not waste much time in conversation, for every moment was precious; but he said enough to give Don an idea of what had passed between himself and the officer of the day, and to enable him to give Fisher and Duncan a very accurate account of it.

"You have got Porter and me and all the rest of us out of a bad scrape," said the sentry, in conclusion. "Now keep mum, or if you speak at all deny everything, and this night's work will prove to be the most bewildering piece of business in the way of guard-running that has ever been done at this academy. Go to your room while the way is open to you, and be quick about it."

Don, whose teeth were chattering with the cold, lost no time in acting upon this suggestion. His first act was to hang his dress-suit in the closet, and his next to deposit in its place on the chair the suit he had on and which he proceeded to pull off with all possible haste. Then he tumbled into bed and turned his face to the wall just as the floor-guard's relief came up the stairs.

"That was another close shave," thought Don,

"and now comes something else. I hope the investigation will not be a very searching one, for if it is, the whole thing is bound to come out. I am always in for a good time when I can have it without getting anybody into difficulty; but when it comes to telling a deliberate lie about it—that's a huckleberry beyond my persimmon."

"I say Don!" whispered Bert, from his bed.

"Great Moses!" was the culprit's mental ejaculation. "Was he awake when I came in? If he was, I am in for lectures by the mile."

"I say, Don!" whispered Bert, in a louder tone.

"M!" said Don, drowsily.

"I thought I heard some one come in just now."

"Very likely you did. The officer of the day has been in here."

"The officer of the day!" repeated Bert, who had learned to dread that official as much as some of the other boys disliked him. "What did he want? Is there anything wrong?"

"He wanted to make sure that we were both safely stowed away in our little beds. Wake me when you hear the morning gun."

This was the substance of the story that Don told his two companions as they strolled about the grounds arm in arm. They listened in amazement, and complimented Don's presence of mind in no measured terms. Don said he didn't look upon it as much of an exploit—that almost any boy could have done the same thing under the same circumstances, adding—

“But there are two or three matters that I want cleared up, and at least one on which I wish to come to the plainest kind of an understanding with you. What made Henderson halt me?”

“I don't know, I am sure,” replied Duncan. “He made the biggest kind of a blunder, didn't he?”

“I'll tell you what *I* think about it,” said Tom. “Dick probably knew that there was somebody else watching you, and that if he didn't challenge you, he would be reported for neglect of duty.”

“That was the construction I put upon his conduct,” said Don.

“We can't expect a fellow to get himself into trouble for the sake of keeping another out of it, you know,” chimed in Clarence Duncan.

"Of course not. Now, Fisher, what was the reason you were not there at that door to let me in?"

"I was to blame for that," said Clarence. He knew Don would be sure to ask that question, and while the latter was telling his story he had leisure to make up his mind how he would answer it. "When I was running toward the academy I heard footsteps in the guard-room, and believing that the relief was being called, I dodged behind the building to wait until they began the round of the posts. Just then Henderson challenged, and shortly afterward some one ran by me and went into the academy through the back door. I supposed it was you; and believing that I was the last one to go in, I took pains to examine the doors leading out of the fire-escape, knowing that they would all be tried by the officer of the day when he came up to look into the rooms. In the door opening on to your floor I found a key of which I took possession, supposing, of course, that you had used it to let yourself in and forgotten to take it away with you."

"That was perfectly right, Gordon," said Tom

Fisher. "If the officer of the day had found that key in the door, it would have knocked our night excursions into a cocked hat. The teachers don't even suspect that we make use of the doors leading to the back stairs, and if they ever find it out——"

"Then good-by to Cony Ryan's pancakes," said Duncan, finishing the sentence for his companion. "What is that point on which you wish to come to the plainest kind of an understanding with us?" he added, in the hope of turning the conversation into another channel. He was afraid that Don might begin a vigorous cross-questioning, and find a flaw or two in the story he had told him regarding that key.

"It is this," replied Don: "When that floor-guard, whatever his name is, let me in, he told me to keep mum; or, if I opened my lips at all, to deny everything. Now, that is something I'll not do to please or screen anybody."

Don's companions were utterly astounded. They withdrew their arms from his, and stood off and looked at him.

"I didn't think you were that sort of a chap," said Fisher.

"Neither did I," exclaimed Duncan. "We have been deceived in you."

"You certainly have, if you picked me up for that kind of a fellow," answered Don, boldly, "and you had better drop me like a hot potato. All the secrets you have intrusted to my keeping are perfectly safe with me; but I want you to understand that I will not tell a barefaced lie, if I should chance to be hauled up, to keep you or any one else out of trouble."

"Do you mean to say that you will confess if you are hauled up?" demanded Duncan.

"If the superintendent asks me if I ran the guard last night, I shall tell him the truth. That's what I mean."

"And give the rest of us away too?" exclaimed Fisher.

"By no means," answered Don, quickly. "I didn't say that. If he asks me any questions I don't want to answer, I can keep my mouth shut, can't I?"

"But will you? That's the point."

"If you think I can't be trusted, you had better drop me," was Don's reply.

It was plain that Tom and Clarence were very

much disappointed in Don, and that they did not know what to make of him. He had shown himself perfectly willing to break the rules of the school, but his sense of honor would not permit him to lie about it in order to escape punishment. They had never before met a boy like him.

"I don't believe such a fellow ever lived since the days of George Washington," thought Duncan; "and neither do I believe he means what he says. If he is questioned, he will blow the whole thing, and some of us will be sent down as sure as the world. Gordon won't do to tie to—I can see that with half an eye. If you will excuse me, fellows," he added, aloud, "I will go and ask Dick Henderson to give an account of himself."

Tom would have been glad to go with Duncan, for he wanted an opportunity to ask him what he thought of this boy who would not tell a lie when circumstances seemed to demand it; but as he could think up no good excuse for leaving Don just then, he remained with him, and Duncan went off alone. Dick was easily found, for he was loitering about waiting for a chance to speak to Duncan or Fisher. He expected that there

was trouble ahead, and he wanted it distinctly understood that if it came, Duncan was the boy who was to blame for it.

“You’re a wise one, you are,” said he, when Clarence came up to him. “If it hadn’t been for some hocus-pocus that I don’t begin to understand, you would have got us all into a nice mess by your blundering. You told me to halt the ninth man, but it turned out to be somebody besides Don Gordon.”

“There’s where you are mistaken,” said Clarence. “It was Gordon and nobody else.”

“But he gave the signal all fair and square,” replied Dick, “and I’d like to know where he got it.”

“I am sure I don’t know. Fisher didn’t give it to him in my hearing, and I didn’t suppose he had it. I don’t know whether to be glad or sorry that you didn’t succeed in stopping him. He’s got a pocketful of money, and paid our bill at Cony’s last night like a gentleman; but he’s no good, and when the boys hear what he said to Tom and me just a few minutes ago, I don’t think they will go on any more excursions with him. He says that he will not blow on any of us, but

if he is accused of running the guard, he will acknowledge it, because he can't tell a lie."

"Humph!" exclaimed Dick, contemptuously. "Somebody ought to make him the hero of a Sunday-school book. We don't want anything more to do with him."

"That's what I say. Now be on your guard, and be careful how you talk to him."

"But what shall I say to him if he insists on knowing why I challenged him?"

"Tell him as Fisher did, that you had to do it in order to protect yourself; that the officer of the day was talking with post No. 4, or something of that sort."

Greatly to the relief and surprise of Tom Fisher and his party, no trouble grew out of that night's work. The investigation came off that forenoon, but the matter was not sifted to the bottom, as the officer of the day had declared it should be, for the simple reason that it could not be done. All the floor-guards and sentries who had been on duty between the hours of ten in the evening and four in the morning were subjected to a thorough examination; but nothing was drawn from them. The innocent had nothing to tell, and the guilty ones

were such adepts at lying that they succeeded in escaping punishment, even if they did not succeed in escaping suspicion. Dick Henderson said he had tried to stop somebody who ran past him ; but he was quite positive that he did not know who he was. The officer of the day and the corporal of the guard were certain that they had looked into every room on all the floors, and that every bed was occupied. The only conclusion the superintendent could come to was, that somebody had been outside the grounds after taps ; but who he was, and how he got out, were other and deeper questions. He held a council of war with the teachers after completing the examination of the sentries, and with them discussed various plans for preventing such excursions in future, or, at least, making them more difficult of accomplishment. One suggestion which he decided to adopt was carried out that very afternoon.

Of course Don and his guilty comrades were very anxious to learn the result of the investigation ; and when the hour of recreation came, they sent out some of their number to interview the sentries and floor-guards. The reports these faithful scouts brought back were very encourag-

ing. The general impression among the sentries who had faithfully performed their duty the night before seemed to be that, although the teachers had their suspicions, they would not proceed any further in the matter for the simple reason that nothing could be proved against anybody. They were also united in the belief that in future the buildings and grounds would be more closely guarded.

"Well, as soon as we find out what new precautions are to be taken, we can lay our plans accordingly, said Fisher to his friend Duncan. "What is it, Bub?" he added, turning to Dick Henderson, who just then hurried up with a face full of news.

"Come with me and see for yourselves," answered Dick. "Last night's work was an unlucky thing for us, but I am not to blame for it."

Dick led the way around the academy building and stopped in front of the back door. It was open, and in the lower hall stood a carpenter who was bending over a box of tools. Fisher and Duncan looked at Dick, but he only shrugged his shoulders and waved his hand toward the man, as if to say that if they wanted any in-

formation they could ask it of him. Taking the hint, Tom inquired :

“What are you doing in there?—Anything broken?”

“Not that I know of,” replied the man, looking up to see who it was that addressed him. “I am putting some new fastenings on these doors so that you boys can’t slip out so easily of nights. I am afraid you are getting to be a bad lot—a very bad lot,” he added, with a grin, as he picked up three or four strong bolts and made his way up the stairs.

“Clarence was thunderstruck, while Tom was so highly enraged that for a minute or two he could not trust himself to speak.

CHAPTER IX.

DON'S YANKEE INVENTION.

"I AM not to blame for it, fellows," repeated Dick. "I did just as I was told to do, as nearly as I could. I know I did not succeed in stopping Don Gordon, and I don't believe there is a boy in school who could have stopped him; but I did my best."

"I hope you see now what you have done by your meddling," exclaimed Tom, turning fiercely upon Duncan. "You are not at all to blame, Dick; only another time don't take any private orders from anybody. We all run the same risk, and we ought all to have a word to say in regard to the manner in which things shall be conducted."

"If Dick had stopped Gordon, as I told him to do, this thing never would have happened," said Duncan, as soon as he had had time to collect his wits.

"There's where I differ with you," answered

Tom. "The fact that Gordon wasn't stopped does not in the least alter the case, so far as these bolts are concerned. If Don had been caught, the bolts would have been put on all the same, and, furthermore, you and I and all the rest of us would have had to stand a court-martial, for Don would have gone back on us as sure as you are a foot high. Dick ought to have let him pass."

"And I would, too, if Clarence hadn't told me to halt him," exclaimed Dick.

"I know it. Duncan is the one we have to thank for the loss of many pleasant evenings we might have had this winter. We may as well throw away our keys, for they will be of no further use to us, now that the doors are to be bolted on the inside."

"I don't know why you should take on so about those bolts," exclaimed Duncan, who began to think he had been scolded quite enough. "If we wanted to go to Cony's to-night, what is there to hinder one of us from slipping up the stairs as soon as this man goes away, and drawing the bolts? Don't throw away your key yet, Tom. It may come handy to you."

Fisher, who was too angry to reply, turned on his heel and walked away. Before many hours had passed all the boys belonging to the "set" had heard about the bolts, and listened with no little indignation to the story of Clarence Duncan's "meddling"—all except Don Gordon, who did not know that he was the victim of misplaced confidence. The fellows were careful to keep that from his ears for fear that he and Clarence would come to blows over it. Some of them would have looked upon a fight between these two as an interesting spectacle; but they knew that it would be followed by a court of inquiry, during which some things they wanted to keep concealed would probably be brought to light. They had learned that it was not quite safe to trust their friend Duncan too far; and as for Don, he was a stranger, and there was no telling how he would act or what he would say when he was told that he could take his choice between answering such questions as were propounded to him, and being punished by expulsion from the school.

"That would bring him to his senses," said Tom to some of his cronies who had gathered

about him to talk over the situation. "He says he wouldn't blow on us, but I don't believe a word of it. There isn't a boy in school who can stand defiant in the presence of the superintendent when he draws down those gray eyebrows of his and looks at a fellow as if he meant to pierce him through. Hallo! here comes Henderson with more news. He's a bully little scout, even if he did come near getting us all into trouble by halting Don Gordon. What is it this time, Dick?"

"We may as well follow your advice and throw away our keys, for they are of no use to us now," was Dick's reply. "The officer of the day goes up and tries those doors and examines the new fastenings as regularly as he makes his rounds."

"There!" exclaimed Tom, in great disgust. "You see what Duncan has brought us to by being so smart. No more pancakes for us."

During the next few weeks nothing happened at the academy that is worthy of record. Duncan and Don Gordon had rather a lonely time of it, for the members of the "set" were not as cordial toward them as they used to be. They did

not cut them entirely, for they did not think that would be quite safe; but they did not seek them out and associate with them as freely as they would if they had been on friendly terms. Duncan took it very much to heart, but Don did not seem to care. He studied and drilled with the rest, and having served the sentence that had been passed upon him for overstaying the time for which his leave of absence was granted, he began to feel and act more like himself. So did Bert, who soon began to count his friends by the score. They were true friends, too, and very unlike the boys who belonged to Tom Fisher's crowd.

It was not long before the Plebes began to show the result of their regular and fatiguing drills. They became handy with their muskets, very proficient in company and battalion evolutions, and, finally, they were ordered to go on dress parade. This honor brought with it a duty from which they had thus far been exempt, that of standing guard.

Up to this time Cony Ryan had been deserted by all except a very few of his old patrons who sometimes passed an hour or two there of a

Saturday afternoon ; but they never came away without telling one another that they had not enjoyed themselves in the least—that their visits now were not at all like the jolly times they used to have when they crowded into his little parlor after creeping by the sentries. There had been none of that sort of work of late. The sight of the bolts the carpenter had put on the doors, and the increased vigilance of the officer of the day, had taken all the courage out of the bravest of them ; at least so it seemed, for no one ever thought of running the guard now. Tom Fisher had almost forgotten that he had ever done such a thing, when one day he was approached by Don Gordon, who beckoned him off on one side.

“Look here, old fellow,” said Don, “you’ll dry up and blow away if you don’t have some excitement to put your blood in circulation. If you want to go down to Cony’s again, to-night is your time.”

“But the bolts !” exclaimed Tom, greatly surprised.

“The bolts won’t delay you five minutes,” replied Don, confidently. “I haven’t been idle

during the last few days, and I have found a way to draw those bolts."

"I could do it myself by going up the back stairs," said Tom; "but the officer of the day would find it out the first time he made his round. Besides, we want to get in after we have gone out, and how would we throw those bolts back to their place when the door was closed behind us? Have you thought of that?"

"I have; but I can show you how it can be done easier than I can explain it to you. We can't go up to my floor to operate, for Bert is standing guard there. Who's on your floor?"

"Clarence Duncan."

"Are you willing to trust him? I notice that you and he are not quite as thick as you used to be."

"I've got to trust him whether I am willing or not. If I should go back on him entirely he would find a way to get me into a row that would send me down."

"I don't see how he could make anything by that. He is as deep in the mud as you are, and he would probably be sent down himself."

"He wouldn't care for that. He'll go any

lengths to injure a boy he hates. That's his style. I have managed to keep up a show of friendship with him, and I know he will let you do anything you like on his floor. Come on."

Clarence, who was seated in his chair reading a sensational story paper that one of the students had smuggled into the academy, nodded to Tom, returned Don's salute, and would probably have paid no further attention to them had he not seen them turn into the hall that led to the fire-escape. This excited his curiosity and he arose and followed them.

"What are you going to do here?" he demanded.

"Gordon has discovered a way to open these doors," replied Tom.

"Not from this side," exclaimed Duncan.

"Yes, from this side," said Don. "I have done it once, and I know I can do it again."

Duncan, who believed that the feat could not possibly be accomplished, was unable to find words with which to express his surprise. He could only look bewildered. He took up a position in the main hall so that he could watch the stairs and guard against intrusion, and occasion-

ally turned his eyes toward Don, whose proceedings he watched with the greatest interest.

Don's first act was to produce his pocket-knife, with which he removed from the lower left-hand corner of the panel above the lock a round plug of wood, which fitted into a hole about half an inch in diameter. The top of the plug was painted white, like the door, and it filled the opening so accurately that the different officers of the day, who had probably looked at it a hundred times since it had been placed there, had never seen it. Don then pulled out of his pocket a short, crooked wire, one end of which was bent into the form of a hook and the other made into the shape of a ring. The hook he inserted into the hole in the panel, and a moment later the bolt was heard to slide from its socket.

"There you are," said he, turning to Tom. "Now, take out your key and open the door."

Tom obeyed, lost in wonder, and then he and Duncan stepped forward to see how Don's invention worked. Simple as it was, it was admirably adapted to the purpose for which it was intended. "The only difficult thing about it," said Don, in explanation, "is to get the hook around the knob

of the bolt. That done, a simple turn of the wrist does the rest."

"Gordon, you're a good one," exclaimed Tom. "You ought to be a Yankee."

"This is a Yankee invention—at least a New England carpenter was the one who brought it to my notice," answered Don, as Fisher closed and locked the door. "While he was doing some work on our plantation, our smoke-house and corn-cribs were robbed more than a dozen times. It seemed impossible for father to get locks that could not be picked or broken. The carpenter said he could put a stop to that business, and he did it by making some heavy wooden bolts, working on the same principle that this one does, only there were three or four knobs in them instead of one. Then he made a key, in shape something like this one of mine, and when we wanted to shut up for the night, all we had to do was to throw the bolts to their places, take out the wire, and the doors were fast. There was but one way to pass them, and that was to break them down; and if anybody had tried that he would have got himself into business directly, for I own some dogs that won't permit any such doings."

"Well, I've locked the door," said Tom, when Don ceased speaking, "and now I'd like to see you throw that bolt back again. That's important, you know."

Don said he knew it. He thrust his wire through the opening again, and in a second more the bolt was shot into its socket. In order to make sure of it, Tom unlocked the door again and tried to open it; but the bolt held it fast. Don's plan would work to perfection—Fisher and Duncan were sure of it.

"When did you find opportunity to do all this work?" asked the former.

"O, I did it at odd times when I thought there was the least danger of being caught; but, I tell you, I had a narrow escape once. I was working on this very door, and Tom, you were floor-guard at the time. You see there were a good many days when I couldn't do anything at all on account of the guards, who I knew were not to be trusted. Well, I was working there in the dark and had just put the plug into the hole, when the bell rang. I had been obliged to do some whittling in order to make the plug fit to suit me, but I had been careful to put all the

shavings on a piece of paper. If I had left them on the floor, and anybody had come in there with a lantern, he would have seen them, of course, and I should have had my work for nothing. When I heard the bell ring, I grabbed up that piece of paper and started for the stairs; but just then the back door opened, and who should come in but the officer of the day."

Don's auditors, who were listening with almost breathless interest, uttered ejaculations indicative of the greatest surprise and sympathy.

"I thought I was fairly cornered," continued Don, "and at first I did not know what to do. I listened until I heard the officer go into the hall on the lower floor, and then I jerked off my boots and went up the next two flights of stairs, and up the ladder that leads to the scuttle; and there I sat on one of the topmost rounds until he tried all the doors and went down again."

"Don, you're a good one," said Fisher, again. "But why didn't you let us know what you were doing? Some of us might have helped you."

"Well, you see, I expected to be caught, and I wanted to be able to say that I had received no assistance, and that nobody knew what I was up

to. I couldn't have told that story if I had taken you into my confidence ; and I wouldn't, either."

We confess to a great liking for Don Gordon, and to a positive admiration of his moral as well as physical courage ; but we are not blind to his failings. We have no patience with the way he acted at school after the solemn promises he had made his mother—they were all forgotten now—nor do we like the way he reasoned with himself. In his opinion there were different grades of lies. For example : If the superintendent had asked him if it were he who had been halted by Dick Henderson on a certain morning, he would have promptly replied that it was—the fear of punishment would not have made him deny it ; and yet when he reached his room he told Bert a lie, although every word he uttered was the truth. By the answers he gave to Bert's questions he led the latter to infer that the officer of the day was the only one who had come into that room, and we know that such was not the case. Don was not altogether consistent.

"Are all the doors that lead into the fire-escape fixed in this way ?" asked Tom.

"No ; only yours and mine. There was no need

of bothering with the other two doors, for the boys in the first and second classes don't run with our crowd."

"That's so," said Duncan; "but I know that some of them go to Cony Ryan's as regularly as we do."

"They used to," said Tom; "but I don't think they have been there since these new fastenings were put on. What shall I do with this?" he added, as Don passed the wire over to him.

"Why, take it and use it."

"Then what will you do?"

"I have another, but I shall not need it to-night."

"Are you not going down to Cony's with us?"

"I can't. I am to relieve Henderson on post No. 8 at midnight; so you'll have to go out and come in by Dick and me."

That night everything passed off smoothly. The guards who held the floor when Tom and a chosen few went out and in, were accommodating; the bolt was easily worked by the aid of the wire Don had fashioned; the sentries on post No. 8 kept themselves out of sight; the pancakes and

syrup were excellent ; the night was passed in a most agreeable manner ; and at three o'clock in the morning the guard-runners were all sleeping soundly in their beds, and no one was the wiser for what they had done. They missed Don (especially Tom Fisher, who had to pay his share of the bill from a very slender purse), whom they as well as Cony Ryan declared to be an honor to his class.

"It begins to look as though the old times were coming back again," said Cony, as he sat by and saw his pancakes disappear before the attacks of his visitors, who ate as though they never had anything good served up to them at the academy. "I tell you the boys who went to school here years ago, some of whom are now men with boys of their own to look after, were a sharp lot. You couldn't keep them in if they didn't want to stay, and there was no use in trying. Of late you fellows haven't done anything to be proud of ; but perhaps this young Gordon will put some life into you."

And he certainly did. Guard-running, in which Don took an active part, became of common occurrence, although the teachers never suspected it ; and Cony Ryan slapped his well-lined pockets

and blessed the day that brought Don Gordon to the Bridgeport academy. But the reckoning came at last, though long delayed, and Don, aided by an unexpected proceeding on the part of Tom Fisher, did something that raised him to a high place in the estimation of all the students, and knocked the "set" so high that it never came down again ; at least it was never heard of afterward. It came about in this way :

Winter had passed, the snow had disappeared, the ice was all out of the river, the buds were starting on the maple trees, and those of the students who were ambitious to be something better than privates in their companies, were studying night and day to prepare themselves for the approaching examination. These found rest and recreation by whipping the neighboring brooks for trout on Saturday afternoon (you know it is time to begin trout-fishing when the maple buds start), while Tom Fisher and his followers diverted themselves by running the guard as often as the opportunity was presented.

On a certain night one of Tom's friends who held one of the outside posts from eight o'clock until midnight, was taken suddenly ill, and was

relieved by the corporal, his beat being taken by a boy who did not belong to the "set." Tom had made arrangements for visiting Cony Ryan's, and Don Gordon had charge of his floor. When taps had sounded, and the officer of the day had made his rounds, the guard-runners left their dormitories, one by one, Don turning his back so that he did not see them as they passed. They left the building without being discovered, but when they attempted to pass the sentry, their troubles began. They were halted, and by a voice that did not belong to the friend they had expected to find on that post. Amazed and disconcerted, they huddled together for a moment like a flock of sheep that had been suddenly frightened, and then, knowing that there was but one thing they could do, they turned and started for the academy on a dead run, the vigilant sentry all the while rending the air with his lusty calls for the corporal of the guard. They tumbled up the stairs, gained access to the floor on which their dormitories were situated, pulled off their uniforms without loss of time and went to bed, as miserable and frightened a lot of boys as the walls of that academy had ever inclosed.

"Did you ever hear of anything so very unfortunate?" whispered Fisher to his friend Duncan. "If there was any one of our fellows except Gordon in charge of this floor, we should be all right, for it is as dark as a pocket out of doors, and I know that that sentry could not have recognized us."

"We ought never to have had anything to do with Gordon in the first place," whispered Duncan, in reply.

"That's what I have thought for a long time; but it is too late to mend the matter now. There they are," he added, as the sound of footsteps on the stairs came to their ears. "It is all over with us now."

So thought Don Gordon, only he used the word "me" instead of "us." "I am in for it," he soliloquized, "and I would give something to know what they will do with me. I'll not go back on the boys, and that's flat. The superintendent will give me a lively shake-up, of course; and then what will Bert say? What will mother think?"

When the officer of the day, attended as usual by the corporal, came up the stairs, he found Don

pacing slowly along the hall with his hands behind his back. They returned his salute, but did not speak to him. They went to the upper end of the hall and began a thorough examination of all the rooms, the officer of the day arousing the occupant of every bed, while the corporal held his lantern aloft so that the face of each one could be plainly seen. Don's dummy would not have saved him this time. When they had satisfied themselves that no one on that floor was missing, and had tried the door opening into the hall that led to the fire-escape, they went up the stairs to look into the dormitories on the floors above. In a quarter of an hour they went back to the guard-room, and Don was left alone. Scarcely had the sound of their footsteps died away in the lower hall when a dozen doors were softly opened, and almost twice as many heads were thrust cautiously out. "What's the row, Gordon?" was the whispered chorus that saluted Don's ears. "What did the officer of the day wake us up for? Anybody out?"

"There's no one out who belongs on this floor," replied Don. "And if there has been anything going on up stairs, I don't know it."

"What did he say to you?"

"Not a word?"

The students were all surprised to hear this, and there were some among them who were frightened as well. After a few more questions, which brought no information from Don for the simple reason that he had none to impart, the students all went back to bed except Fisher and Duncan, who lingered to have a word with Don in private. They were ill at ease, and told themselves that when the new fastenings were put on the doors, some new routine had been adopted of which they had not yet heard.

"Didn't he ask you any questions at all—not a single one?" whispered Fisher.

"He didn't open his lips," answered Don.

"Didn't say anything to you about reporting to him as soon as you were relieved, did he?" put in Duncan, who thought Don must surely be mistaken.

"How could he, when he didn't open his lips?" asked Don, in reply.

"This is an unusual way of doing business," said Tom, reflectively, "and there's something about it that doesn't look just right to me. Now,

mark my words, fellows: they're going to spring something new on us, and they will do it so suddenly, that it will knock us flatter than one of Cony Ryan's pancakes. You'll see."

And sure enough they did.

CHAPTER X.

BREAKING UP THE "SET."

IT was an eager and anxious lot of boys who answered to roll-call the next morning. Of course they knew that a party of their fellows had been challenged while they were attempting to run the guard, and they were impatient to learn who they were, and what the superintendent was going to do about it. Two things astonished and bewildered them: They could not imagine how the culprits had managed to leave the building and get back again so easily, and neither could they understand why the officer of the day had neglected to question the floor-guards. They believed, with Tom Fisher, that something new was to be "sprung" on them; and as soon as breakfast was over, they found out what it was. On ordinary occasions the quartermaster-sergeants marched their respective companies to and from the dining-hall; but on this particular morning the captains took command and led them to

the drill-room, where they were drawn up in line as they were when preparing for dress-parade. The teachers were all there, and many a sly and inquiring glance was cast toward them ; but their countenances revealed nothing.

“Right dress ! — Front !” commanded the captains, as the companies came into line ; and when these orders had been obeyed, the superintendent, who stood in the place that is occupied by the battalion commander during dress-parade, thus addressed them :

“Young gentlemen,” said he, and his tones were not near as stern and severe as the boys expected they would be, “I am sorry to hear that some of you attempted to run the guard last night. Heretofore, when such offences have been committed, it has been our rule to examine the floor-guards and sentries who were on duty at the time, but we have seldom succeeded in drawing from them any information that would lead to the detection of the guilty parties. A student who will prove false to his duty, and violate the confidence reposed in him, will not scruple to tell any number of falsehoods to conceal his wrong-doing. Now I intend, before these

ranks are broken, to learn the names of all those who tried to run by post No. 8 last night, as well as the name of the floor-guard who permitted them to pass. The first sergeants will now call the roll, and you can answer 'guilty,' or 'not guilty,' just as your sense of honor may seem to dictate. If innocent, simply answer 'here' and keep your place in the ranks; if you are guilty, step three paces to the front. I put you all upon your honor."

When the superintendent ceased speaking, the first sergeants moved to the front and centre of their respective companies, and the roll-call began. As it proceeded, more than one boy standing in the ranks of the third company tried to twist himself around so that he could catch a glimpse of Don Gordon's face, hoping to see something there that would give him a hint of the course Don intended to pursue when his turn came to answer to his name.

"He certainly will not—he dare not—confess," were the thoughts that passed through their minds. "If he does, he will be sent down, sure. If some one could only get a chance to whisper a word or two in his ear, we would come

out all right yet, in spite of this honor business."

The anxiety and alarm experienced by these boys showed very plainly in their countenances, and before the roll-call had been going on for two minutes, the superintendent could have stepped forward and picked out every one of the guard-runners.

The names of the boys belonging to the first and second companies were called in quick succession, and as yet nobody had stepped to the front. The culprits, in this instance, all belonged to the third class, with the single exception of Don Gordon, who, having long ago made up his mind what he would do, waited with some impatience to see how his companions in guilt would stand the test. The result was just what he might have expected.

"Clarence Duncan," said the third company sergeant.

"Here," answered the owner of that name, making a desperate but unsuccessful effort to appear at his ease.

"George W. Brown."

"Here."

"Richard Henderson."

"Here."

"Thomas Fisher."

"Here."

"They're a pack of cowards," was Don's mental comment. "Such fellows always are, and I ought to have known better than to take up with them. My last act in this school will be to show them and everybody else that I am just as willing to pay the fiddler as I am to dance."

At last the sergeant of the fourth company began, and near the top of his list was the name--
"Donald Gordon."

There was no response to it ; but to the intense amazement of everybody present, and the almost overwhelming consternation of some, Don stepped quickly and firmly to the front. No one outside the "set" would have thought of picking him out as a guard-runner. The sergeant hesitated and stammered over the next name, and there was a perceptible flutter among all except the first-class boys. They showed their three years' drill and discipline by standing as stiff as so many posts and holding their eyes straight to the front ; but they could not control their countenances, and

surprise and sorrow were depicted upon every one of them. When the roll-call was ended the sergeants went back to their places, and Don was left standing alone. He had passed through one ordeal, and now came another.

"Gordon," said the superintendent, "I am glad to see that you have too much manhood to take refuge behind a lie. I should have been very much surprised and grieved if you had showed me that I had formed a wrong opinion of you."

These words made some of the guilty ones in the third class open their eyes. Duncan's face grew whiter than ever, while Tom Fisher said to himself:

"I really believe the old fellow knows right where to look to find every boy who was outside the building last night after taps. If I had had the faintest suspicion that Don intended to confess, I should have been ahead of him. He'll get off easy by giving the names of the rest of us, and Duncan and I and a few others, who kicked up such a row last term, will be sent down."

"You had charge of the third floor between the hours of eight and twelve last evening,"

continued the superintendent, addressing himself to Don.

"Yes, sir," was the reply.

"And while you were on duty several boys, who you knew intended to run the guard, left their dormitories, and you permitted them to pass out of the building?"

"Yes, sir," said Don, again.

"Give me the names of those boys," said the superintendent, nodding to the adjutant, who pulled out his note-book and pencil; but he did not use them—at least just then. While he held his pencil in the air and looked at Don, and the culprits were trembling with apprehension, and the others were listening with all their ears to catch the first name that fell from Don's lips, the answer came clear and distinct:

"I hope you will not insist upon that, sir, for it is something I do not like to do."

The superintendent stared, the teachers looked astonished, and another flutter of excitement ran along the line. This time it did not even miss the first-class boys, some of whom so far forgot themselves as to turn their heads and look at

the boy who dared stand in the presence of the head of the school and say that he did not like to obey an order that had been given him point-blank. Such a thing had never happened before in the Bridgeport academy. Don's companions in guilt began to breathe easier.

"If he will only stick to that *I* am all right ; but *he* will have to go down," soliloquized Clarence Duncan, whose every thought was a selfish one, and who did not care the snap of his finger what became of Don or anybody else, so long as he escaped punishment himself.

"That bangs me," thought Tom Fisher, who was not altogether bad at heart, even though he did have faults almost without number. He knew a brave boy when he saw one, and Don's conduct excited his unbounded admiration. "He's the pluckiest fellow I ever saw, and he shall not be sent down if I can help it."

"Do you refuse to give me the names of those boys?" asked the superintendent, as soon as he had somewhat recovered from his surprise.

"I would rather not, sir," replied Don. He did not like to use so strong a word as "refuse,"

but still his answer was given in a tone which showed that he had no intention of wavering.

"You know the alternative?" said the superintendent, quietly but firmly.

"Yes, sir."

"And you are willing to submit to it?"

"Yes, sir."

"But I am not willing that he should, sir," exclaimed Tom Fisher, stepping three paces to the front and raising his hand to his cap. "If he won't tell who the guard-runners are, I will."

"Attention!" shouted the superintendent, who was utterly confounded by this breach of discipline; but Tom, having made a resolution, was determined to stick to it, regardless of the consequences.

"No boy in this academy shall ever again suffer for my misdeeds if I can help it," said he, speaking as rapidly as he could in order that he might get everything off his mind before he was interrupted. "I was one of the guard-runners, and if the others have the least particle of pluck in them——"

"*Attention!*" shouted the superintendent again. "Captain Morgan" he added, addressing

the commander of the first company, "detail a corporal's guard to take private Fisher to his room under arrest."

"I don't care," thought Tom, as he was marched off by the guard that was quickly detailed to take charge of him. "I did my best to save Don, and I shall go down with something like a clear conscience. But I really wish the superintendent would give me another chance. I would make an honest and earnest effort to do better."

This was the unexpected act on the part of Tom Fisher to which we referred a short time ago, and which, taken in connection with Don's bold acknowledgment of his guilt, did more to break up guard-running at that academy than all the locks and bolts that could have been put upon the doors. These two incidents upset everybody, teachers included ; but the latter were quick to see how to take advantage of it.

"Sergeant Clayton, call the roll of your company again," said the superintendent.

The sergeant obeyed, and this time all the guard-runners stepped to the front with the exception of Clarence Duncan. He had good

reasons for fearing exposure, as we shall presently see, and believing that his companions would follow Don Gordon's example and refuse to bear witness against him, he was resolved to keep up a bold front, and to deny his guilt to the very last.

"It is a pity that some of these weak-kneed fellows didn't come to the same determination," said he to himself. "There was not a scrap of evidence against any of us, and if they had only stood by me——"

"Sergeant, call private Duncan's name again," said the superintendent, breaking in upon his soliloquy.

"Clarence Duncan," said the sergeant.

"Here," came the response.

"*Clarence Duncan!*" repeated Clayton.

"*Here!*" replied the culprit; adding to himself, "You can't make me own up, and you might as well give up trying."

"Private Duncan, three paces to the front," commanded the superintendent. "Break ranks."

Duncan was taken to his room under guard, and when he got there he found an armed sentry pacing back and forth in front of the door. Tom Fisher was seated at the table with an open book

before him, but he was not studying. He was thinking over the incidents that had just transpired.

"Well, Clarence," said he, cheerfully, "we're in for it."

"Yes," replied Clarence, angrily. "Thanks to you and Don Gordon, we are in for it. I never knew before that you were such a coward. What made you side with Gordon?"

"Well, I had two reasons for it: In the first place, he showed himself to be a good fellow, and as true as steel; and I couldn't stand by and see him punished. If I hadn't spoken up, he would have been sent down for refusing to give our names."

"That's just what ought to have been done with him," said Clarence.

"As the case now stands," continued Tom, "he will, most likely, be let off easy, this being the first time that anything serious has been charged against him."

"And what is to become of you and me?"

"You know what they told us the last time we were court-martialed, don't you?"

"I should think I ought, for I have been

reminded of it often enough. Don't you know that by befriending Don you have got me into a terrible scrape? Don't you remember that my father told me that he would put me on board the school-ship if I were sent down?"

It would have been strange if Tom had forgotten it, for Duncan had such a horror of that same school-ship that he talked about it every day. He had seen and conversed with boys who had been sent there because they would not behave themselves at home, and he had noticed that they all agreed on these two points—that the officers were very stern and severe, and that the life of a hod-carrier was easier and more respectable than that of a foremast hand. Clarence had a deep-rooted horror of the sea and every thing connected with it, and he looked forward to five years on the school-ship with feelings very near akin to those with which he would have looked forward to a term in the penitentiary.

"You went back on me, an old-time friend, for the sake of a boy you never saw or heard of until last winter," continued Clarence. "I didn't act the craven, I tell you. I stuck it out as long as I could."

"Did they find you out?" asked Tom.

"I am under arrest, the same as you are ; but they can't prove anything against me."

"Then how does it come that you are in arrest ?"

"That's just what beats me. They called the roll of our company again after you were sent off under guard, and, to my intense disgust, every fellow who was with us last night stepped to the front. They tried to bully a confession out of me, but I didn't leave the ranks until I was ordered to do so."

"That brings me to the second reason I had for doing as I did," said Tom. "They've got evidence against every one of us."

"I don't see where they got it."

If Clarence had taken the trouble to look in the mirror he would have seen at a glance where the evidence that convicted him came from. He carried it in his face.

We need not dwell upon the incidents that happened during the next few days, for they have nothing to do with our story, and no one except the boys who attended the Bridgeport academy at this particular time would be interested in them. It will be enough to say that the culprits were

confined to their rooms and given ample leisure in which to think over their folly and make good resolutions for the future. The repentant ones devoted the most of their time to their books ; but there were some among them who did nothing but bemoan their hard luck and rail at Don Gordon for being such a " fluke."

The court-martial came off in due time, and Clarence Duncan, who denied his guilt to the very last, and even denounced the others for bearing false witness against him, was sent down ; and it was not long before reports came to the academy that he had been placed on board the schoolship. Tom Fisher was given a new lease of life. He evidently knew just what he was doing when he took sides with Don, for that one act was all that saved him from going home too. Next to Duncan he and Don received the heaviest sentences, both being gated for two months, during which time they were required to walk eight extras with packed knapsacks on their backs. The others were punished in nearly the same way, only they were not gated for so long a period, nor were they called upon to perform as much extra duty. Strange as it may appear, no one suspected

that the guard-runners had made use of the fire-escape. All the blame was laid upon the floor-guard, who suffered accordingly.

These stirring events, as we said before, broke up the "set" completely, and made fast friends of Don Gordon and Tom Fisher, who, holding firmly to their determination to do better, gradually broke off their intimate relations with the lazy, mischievous, and discontented members of their classes, and began to have more to do with fellows who were worth knowing. The manly stand they had taken during the investigation (it *was* a manly act on Don's part, but largely prudential on the part of Tom Fisher) excited the wonder and admiration of all the students, and the boys in the upper classes, who had never taken any notice of them except to return their salutes, now sought them out and became intimate with them. It was certainly a great relief to Don to associate with fellows who were not all the while grumbling about something or discussing plans for getting by the guard. One day he was surprised by a visit from Egan, the first sergeant of his company, who entered his room holding an open letter in his hand.

"Say, Gordon," he exclaimed, taking no notice of Don's salute, "why didn't you let the fellows know that your father used to go to this school?"

"Some of them do know it," replied Don.

"Well, I didn't know it until I received this letter," said the sergeant, helping himself to a chair and throwing his cap on Bert's bed. "I spoke of you in a letter I wrote home a short time ago, and am surprised to learn that your father and mine used to be room-mates and chums when they belonged to this academy. Let's shake."

Don took the sergeant's proffered hand, and this was the beginning of another friendship that has never been broken. The sergeant was just the kind of associate that Don needed. He was a faithful soldier, a close student, a favorite with both teachers and scholars, and his example and influence did wonders for Don Gordon. It is true that during his first year at the academy he had been rather restive under the strict discipline to which he was subjected. He had even run the guard—if he hadn't he would not have known as much as he did about Cony Ryan's pancakes and maple syrup—and he had paid for his fun by walking extras and being gated; but that was all

over now, and he was one of the last boys in school who would have been suspected of any violation of the rules.

Egan introduced his new friend to the fellows in the first class, and first-class fellows Don found them to be. Some of them were fond of shooting and fishing, knew a good dog and gun when they saw them, and could tell hunting stories without number. Others among them—and they were Southern boys, like Don—thought more of their horses than they did of almost anything else. They were at home in the saddle, and delighted to talk of the fine times they had enjoyed while riding to the hounds. Courtland Hopkins, who was the Falstaff of the academy, always grew enthusiastic when the subject of fox-hunting was introduced.

“Ah! Gordon,” he said one day, “that is the sport *par excellence*. Come down into Maryland with me next vacation, and I’ll show you some fun. A lot of the fellows have been promising to go for a long time, but that’s all it has amounted to.”

“I’d like to see you in the saddle, Hop,” said Egan, taking his friend by the arm and turning

him around so that he could give him a good looking over. "You've almost too much avoirdupois for a rider, according to my way of thinking. In other words, you're a great deal too fat."

"Just give me a good horse, and see if I can't take a ten-rail fence as cleverly as anybody," returned Hopkins, quickly. "I am good for a plate of soup at the International if there is a colt in Bridgeport that can throw me."

"If you will all go home with *me*, I will give you some of the best duck-shooting you ever saw," said Don.

"Yes; but that would require a scatter-gun, and that is something I never did like," said Walter Curtis. "If you want to see fun, combined with skill, take a Thanksgiving dinner with me, and watch the members of our club break glass balls with rifles."

These words were spoken carelessly, but they were not forgotten. If they had been, this series of books would never have been written.

CHAPTER XI.

THE STUDENTS IN CAMP.

TIME flew on, the school term drew to a close, and at last the “day of all days”—the day to which all the students in the Bridgeport Military Academy looked forward with the liveliest anticipations of pleasure—arrived. Of late there had been a perceptible bustle among the boys. Those of their number who had hitherto thought of nothing but mischief, and whose highest ambition was to shirk their duty in every way they could, began to show some interest in the daily school routine, and tried by the hardest kind of study and strict attention to business, to make up for the time they had lost. There was no idleness, and consequently no rules were broken, and there was no extra duty to be done. There was less time wasted in loitering about the grounds, the hours of recreation being devoted to the discussion of various plans for amusement, and

to the overhauling of fly-books and trolling-lines. Their studies were soon to be thrown aside for a whole month; their pleasant dormitories were to be exchanged for shelter-tents; fly-rods, oars, and geologists' hammers were to take the place of the pens, pencils, and mathematical instruments that had so long been their daily companions; and their tiresome drills were to give way to moonlight boat-rides and to—well, to some other sports that would not have been permitted while the students were living at the academy, but which were winked at during the time they were in camp. What these sports were shall be told presently.

As the eventful day drew near, the excitement and impatience, and, we may add, anxiety, of the students increased to such a degree that it was all they could do to study. The reason for this state of affairs was found in the fact that it had somehow leaked out—through what source no one seemed able to tell—that an event of unusual interest was to take place during this particular encampment; something that had never occurred before, and might never occur again. Some of the first-class boys who

were in the secret, had said just enough to put their companions on nettles, but not enough to give them even the faintest idea of what they might expect.

"I know that boat-riding, and trolling for pickerel, and spearing eels by torch-light, are fine sports," Egan said to Don, one day, "and they are exciting, too, when you have no better way of passing the time; but you very soon forget all about the pleasure you have in that way, don't you? Well, there's something going to happen very shortly that you'll not forget so easily, *I* tell you. You will remember it as long as you live."

"Now, sergeant, what is it?" exclaimed Don, after Egan had talked to him a few times in this way. "Can't you give me a hint?"

"No. Couldn't possibly think of it."

"Well, then, if you were told to keep it to yourself, why don't you do it? What's the use of aggravating a fellow in this way?"

"I assure you, my dear boy, that no aggravation is intended," replied Egan, in his blandest tones. "I only meant to prepare you for something you never dreamed of. If your eyes don't

open and your hair stand on end, I—whew ! I can't think of it without a little thrill of excitement."

Meanwhile the question as to where and how the coming vacation should be spent, had been repeatedly referred to and talked over by Don and his three friends in the first class—Egan, Hopkins and Curtis. The latter was anxious to go home and join his friends in the club-shoot that always came off on Thanksgiving day ; Hopkins wanted Don to see him add another "brush" to the numerous trophies of the chase that adorned the walls of his room ; and Don held out strongly in favor of his own shooting-grounds about Diamond Lake. The matter was finally settled by the assistance of General Gordon, who sent each of the boys a cordial invitation to spend at least a small portion of their next vacation at Don's shooting-box, and made sure of its acceptance by communicating with the fathers of these students, all of whom he had known in the days of his boyhood. This point having been decided to his entire satisfaction, Don could have settled down to good hard work, had it not been for the fact that he was continually

looking forward to that "unusual and interesting event" that was to transpire when the boys went into camp. His curiosity had been aroused to the highest pitch, and he could scarcely think about anything else.

The sun rose clear and cloudless on the morning of the first day of August, and before the echoes awakened by the roar of the field-piece had fairly died away, the boys were crowding into the drill-room. Breakfast was served immediately after roll-call, and two hours later three hundred students, led by the band and marching with the precision of veteran soldiers, moved through the wide gateway, and down the principal street of the village toward their camping-ground. Everybody turned out to see them. Flags and handkerchiefs were waved all along their line of march, flowers were showered into their ranks, and when, in obedience to the command: "Platoons, right front into line, double time, march!" they broke from column of fours into column of platoons, the cheers that greeted their prompt and soldier-like execution of the manœuvre, which is always an awkward one unless it is well done, were always deafening.

The camp was always pitched upon a little rise of ground about three miles from the village. In front of it was the river, on its left arose a range of hills which were almost high enough to be called mountains, and among these hills were located the streams and ponds in which the speckled trout, pickerel, sunfish and bass abounded. Here too, were found the thieving raccoons that ravaged the farmers' corn-fields, the hawks that caught their chickens, and the black and gray squirrels which afforded the boys many an exciting hunt and excellent dinner. Between these hills and the camp ran a wide and deep creek, whose rapid current often baffled the skill of the young engineers who tried to throw a pontoon-bridge across it.

On reaching the camping ground the arms were stacked, and the tents, which had already arrived, were distributed among the different companies and pitched at the tap of the drum. Then working-parties were detailed to grade and ditch the streets, provide fire-wood for the kitchens and to perform various other duties, and when they were relieved at four o'clock in the afternoon, the little camp presented a scene of neatness and

order with which the most exacting officer could not have found a word of fault.

There were several orders read that night on dress-parade, and among them was one that expressly prohibited "foraging." Don could not see the necessity for such an order, so he waited for an opportunity to speak to Egan about it.

"It means," said the latter, in response to Don's inquiries, "that we mustn't steal anything from the farmers hereabouts."

"So I supposed. But who is there among us who would be mean enough to do such a thing?"

"I don't know about it's being mean," replied the sergeant, in a tone of voice that made Don open his eyes. "We want something good to eat, don't we?"

"Of course we do; but why can't we buy what we want? We've all got a little pocket-money."

"That's very likely; but it is cheaper to forage."

"But suppose you are caught at it?"

"That's your lookout. You must be sharp enough to get away with your plunder after you have secured it."

"I'll not try it," said Don, decidedly. "I've

had trouble enough this term, and I am not going to have any more black marks placed against my name if I can help it. Besides, I don't see what there is to steal."

"O, there are lots of things. The farmers hardly ever lock their spring-houses, and it's the easiest thing in the world to slip into one of them and take a good swig out of a pan of milk that has cream on it an inch thick. Ah!" said the sergeant, smacking his lips. "That's the way Hop got himself into a snarl last camp."

"Not Court Hopkins!" exclaimed Don.

"Yes, Courtland Hopkins. He and a party of fellows went down to Hudson's one day after some eggs and butter—by the way, that same farmer Hudson always has a splendid melon patch, and the melons will begin to ripen pretty soon—and while some of the boys were occupying the attention of the farmer's wife, Hop slipped around to the spring-house, and there he found a five-gallon jar full of fresh buttermilk. That was too much for Hop, who can make way with more buttermilk than any boy *I* ever saw. He grabbed the jar and made off with it; but just as he was leaving the spring-house, Hudson, who was at work in a field

close by, caught sight of him and started in pursuit. Hop heard him coming, and knowing that he could not escape with his burden, he put it down, never spilling a drop of the milk, and took to his heels. Fat as he is, he led Hudson a good long chase, but he was collared at last and taken to camp."

Don was utterly amazed. Here was Hopkins, who was looked upon by all his companions as a model of perfection, and yet he had been caught in the act of stealing; and here was Egan, another good scholar and a non-commissioned officer besides, who told the story of his friend's guilt as though it were something well worth relating. Don could not understand it.

"What did they do with him?" he asked, as soon as he had somewhat recovered from his surprise.

"Well, the superintendent thought that *that* was carrying matters a little too far, and so he refused Hop a pass for a week," was the sergeant's reply. "But he didn't gain any black marks by it."

"How was that?" inquired Don.

"Why, you see, your record for the term is all

made up, and the books are closed ; and any mischief you may do here in camp will not count against you in the examination. We come out here to have fun, and the teachers are willing we should have it, so long as we keep within bounds. The farmers around here make lots of money out of us every year, and if we want to go into their orchards and melon-patches and help ourselves to what we find there, we are welcome to do it, if we go about it openly and above board ; but if we try to forage on them, they enter into the spirit of the matter as fully as we do, and make every effort to capture us. If they succeed, they march us to camp, and all the boys laugh at us, and we have to fork over money enough to pay for the articles we took, whatever they are. But after all one don't lose anything by it, for very likely that same farmer will meet you the next day and give you a peck of peaches, or an armful of green-corn or a water-melon as big as you can carry."

Don began to understand the matter now, and to see why it was that the students looked forward to their month in camp with so much eagerness and impatience. Here were opportunities

for him to work off a little of his superabundant energy without violating any rules or doing harm to anybody, and those who are acquainted with him will know that he was not long in making up his mind to improve them.

“But there is one thing we have to keep constantly before us,” continued the sergeant, who did not fail to notice and to rightly interpret the look he saw in Don’s eye. “The teachers do not object to innocent fun, but anything that savors of meanness won’t go down. If a boy oversteps the mark, he goes back to the academy and stays there under guard. Duncan went back last camp for trying to rob a hen-roost. The farmer who owned the fowls laughed and said it was all right, but the teachers didn’t think so. I never foraged so much as an ear of corn; but I am a number one deserter.”

“Deserter!” echoed Don, growing more and more interested.

“Yes. You see, we want to do things here just as they are done in a regular camp, and there is much more fun in working up a case against a real culprit, who will try by every means in his power to hide his guilt, than there is in trumping up a

charge against some innocent boy. I have deserted every time I have been in camp."

"What did they do with you?"

"Nothing, for I got back before I was caught. If I had been captured by any of the scouting parties that were sent out in pursuit of me, I should have been court-martialed, and ordered to the guard-tent to await sentence. That's the way they did with Hop, who was sentenced to be shot. But then he deserted when the camp was supposed to be surrounded by the enemy. Hop always was unlucky. He can't do any mischief without being caught at it."

"How did they carry out the sentence?" asked Don.

"They didn't carry it out. They simply put him in the guard-tent, and about midnight the officer of the day came along and let him out; and that was the last of it. When the members of the Grand Army of the Republic hold their encampments, and capture a deserter or a spy, they go through all the forms—seating the prisoner blindfolded on a coffin and shooting at him with blank cartridges. But we don't believe in that. It is almost too much like the reality. By

the way, Gordon, that great European seven-elephant railroad show is advertised to pitch its tent in Bridgeport very shortly, and I should really like to see the man who turns a double somerset over three elephants and four camels; wouldn't you?"

"Of course I would, and I'll go if you will. Shall we ask for a pass?"

"Certainly not, because we don't intend to come back until we get ready. The boys all want to get out of the lines for exercise, and nothing would suit them better than tramping about the country in search of us."

Just then the officer of the day appeared at the door of his tent and beckoned to the sergeant, who hurried away, leaving Don to himself. The latter wished most heartily that that great European seven-elephant railroad show had been billed to appear at Bridgeport that very night, for he was in just the right humor for an adventure. Like Egan, he had no taste for foraging. It is true that he had joined in raids upon melon-patches when they were closely guarded, and when he knew that speedy punishment would be visited upon him if he were discovered and captured, and

he might, without a great deal of urging, have been induced to do the same thing over again, if there were any risk to be run ; but the thought of plundering a good-natured farmer who would freely have given him all the melons he wanted, was not to be entertained for a moment. Desertion, as proposed by Egan, was, according to Don's way of thinking, a more high-toned proceeding. Creeping unobserved past the sentries ; visiting an entertainment that would doubtless be witnessed by a majority of the teachers, and fifty or perhaps a hundred of their school-fellows, all of whom would be glad to report them "just for the fun of the thing ;" roaming about the country wherever their fancy led them ; dodging the scouting parties that were sent in pursuit, and at last, when weary of their freedom, making their way back to camp and into their tents without being caught—there was something interesting and exciting in all this, and the longer Don thought of it the more he wished that the show would hasten its coming.

During the first two weeks the students were kept at work at something nearly all the time, and there were but few passes granted. Don and

Egan were among those who were lucky enough to get out of the lines for an afternoon, and before they came back they had made arrangements for procuring citizen's clothes in which to visit the show when it arrived. After that Don became more impatient and uneasy than ever, and proposed to his friend Egan that they should desert at once, and stay out until the show left town.

"Oh, that would never do," was the sergeant's reply. "We want to absent ourselves only on our 'off' days—that is, on days when there is no work to be done in surveying, or in artillery and rifle-practice. You know I am to complete the course this year, and as I want to pass a good examination, I must be on hand to receive all the practical instruction I can. I wouldn't like to miss that."

"But we don't seem to have any 'off' days," answered Don. "We are kept busy all the time. What's the use of surrounding the camp with these rifle-pits?"

"There are two reasons for it. In the first place, the enemy may be hovering around watching for a chance to make an attack upon us."

Don laughed outright.

“And in the next place, you want to learn just how to go to work to fortify a camp in case you should ever have command of one.”

“Which is not at all likely,” interrupted Don. “Why can’t the engineers stake out the works so that we could see the shape of them, and stop at that? I didn’t come here to handle picks and shovels for so many hours every day, and I don’t see any sense in it.”

Almost the first thing the superintendent did after the students were fairly settled in their new quarters, was to put the engineers at work laying out a very elaborate system of fortifications with which the entire camp was surrounded. The boys would have made no complaint if he had been satisfied with that; but he wasn’t. When the fortifications had been laid out, he detailed working-parties to build them, just as he would have done if the camp had been located in an enemy’s country. Such a thing had never been done before, and Don Gordon was not the only one who could not see any sense in it. At first the boys laughed at their sergeants and corporals, who urged them to greater exertions with their picks and shovels, assuring them at the same

time that an attack might be expected at any moment, and finally they began to get angry with them ; but the attack was made all the same.

But these days of toil were ended at last, and when the old soldiers who lived in Bridgeport came out and inspected the works, and declared with one voice that, in everything except extent, they were equal to any with which the Confederates had surrounded Vicksburg and Richmond, the boys felt that they were in some measure repaid for their labor. They made the most of the days of recreation that followed. Passes were freely granted, and every boy who went outside the lines made it a point to bring back something for his mess-table.

One day, while Don was lounging in his tent, Egan appeared at the door and beckoned him to come out. In one hand he carried a huge yellow poster, which he passed over to Don, with the request that the latter would read it at his leisure, and at the same time he held up the forefinger of the other hand as if he were listening to something. Don listened also, and presently the breeze bore to his ear the enlivening strains of martial music.

"They've come," said Egan, "and they are now making their street parade. Are you ready?"

"I am," answered Don.

"Well, say one o'clock, then. I shall be busy with my reports until——"

"Why, man alive," interrupted Don, "are we going to run the guard in broad daylight?"

"How in the world are we going to help it?" demanded Egan, in reply

"We ought to have gone out last night when we would have had the darkness to aid us," said Don, who began to think that his chances for seeing that wonderful leaper were very slim indeed.

"I couldn't have gone last night, for I was busy; and, as I told you, I don't want to be out of camp when my class is under instruction. I shall be busy until about one o'clock; but after my work is done, I am going to that show. Are you going with me?"

Don answered, very decidedly, that he was.

"I don't deny that we shall have a tight squeak for it," continued the sergeant, pulling off his cap and scratching his head in deep perplexity. "You see, there used to be a little

ridge out there in the upper end of the camp, that ran close by the side of post No. 2. It was thickly lined with bushes, under cover of which a fellow who was at all cautious in his movements, could creep by the sentry very easily; but when these earth-works were built that ridge was cut away, and I haven't yet been able to decide how we are going to get out, although I have reconnoitered every part of the camp more than a dozen times."

"Look here," said Don. "Perhaps one of the sentries could be prevailed upon to keep his back turned when——"

"No, he couldn't," interrupted Egan, who knew very well what Don was about to say. "There isn't a boy in camp who wouldn't report his best friend, if he had the chance, just for the sake of getting a joke on him."

Just then Hopkins and Curtis came hurrying by. Their faces wore a pleased expression, and each held in his hand a piece of paper which he flourished exultantly over his head.

"We're going to see the elephants, and the lions, and tigers, and all the other things," said Curtis. "I say, boys, if you want passes you'd

better not be standing here. The fellows are packed around the superintendent's marquée as closely as sardines in a box."

Don and Egan replied that they had concluded not to ask for passes on that particular day, and Hopkins and his friend hurried on to their tents to exchange their fatigue suits for their dress uniforms.

"I haven't yet been able to decide how we are going to get out," repeated the sergeant, when he and Don were left alone, "but don't you worry about that. I'll hit upon something before the time for action arrives."

"All right," replied Don. "I'll be ready when you want me."

Egan turned toward his tent, and Don went back into his. He spent the time until dinner in reading the poster the sergeant had given him, hundreds of which had that morning been distributed about the camp by village boys who were hired for that purpose, and then he made his toilet and waited for the hands on his watch to travel around to one o'clock. They had scarcely got there before Sergeant Egan put in an appearance, carrying in his hand a small tin pail.

He seemed somewhat disconcerted when he looked into Don's tent, for it was full of boys.

"Come in, sergeant," said Bert, pleasantly.

"Where are you going?" inquired Don. "To the spring after some fresh water, I suppose. Hold on till I get a bucket, and I will go with you."

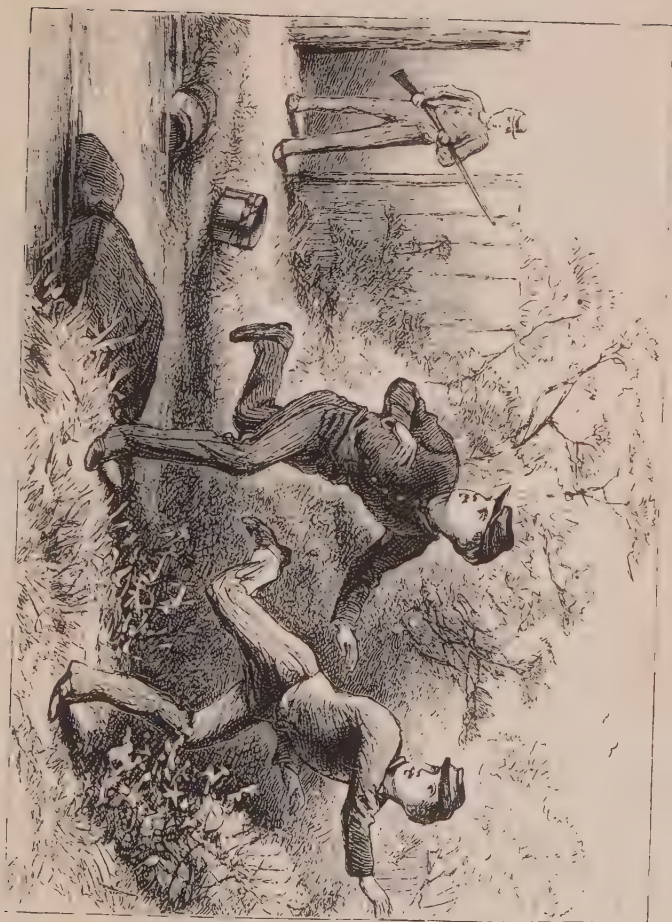
"So will I," said Bert.

That wouldn't do at all. The sergeant looked perplexed, but Don was equal to the emergency.

"Bert," said he, "you stay here till I come back, and I will have something to tell you."

The confiding Bert was good-natured enough to submit without any argument, and Don, having secured a bucket, walked off with the sergeant. To his great surprise Egan led the way directly to the principal gate, and the sentry who was on duty there allowed them to pass without a word of protest. He had no business to do it, and if they had exhibited the least timidity, or been at all uncertain in their movements, they would have been halted on the instant; but, as it was, their audacity carried them safely through.

RUNNING THE GUARD.



If Don had been alone he would have been stopped beyond a doubt; but the fact that he was in the company of a non-commissioned officer, who, however, had no more right to go outside the lines than a private had, disarmed the sentry of all suspicion.

The two deserters, astonished and delighted at the ease with which their escape had been effected, but showing no outward signs of exultation, walked slowly toward the spring, which bubbled up among the rocks about fifty yards from the gate, their every movement being closely watched by the sentry, who began to wonder if he had done just right in permitting them to pass. They made a great show of washing out their pails, stopping now and then to point out to each other objects of interest on the opposite side of the creek, all of which they had seen a hundred times before; and at last, pretending to discover something at a little distance that they considered to be worthy of close examination, they set down their buckets and moved down the bank of the stream. That movement aroused the sentry, who now began to see through the little game that had been so neatly played upon him.

"Halt!" he shouted, bringing his musket to "arms port."

"Now for it, Gordon," said Egan, in an excited whisper. "Leg bail is all that will save us."

Suiting the action to the word, the sergeant pulled his fatigue cap down over his ears and darted through the bushes like a frightened hare, Don following close at his heels.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DESERTERS AT THE SHOW.

“**H**ALT !” shouted the sentry. “Corporal of the guard No. 1.”

“This is a regular game of ‘follow the leader,’ Gordon,” said Egan, looking back over his shoulder. “Are you good at that?”

“I used to be,” answered Don.

“They’ll be after us in less than no time,” continued the sergeant; “and as there are some splendid runners among the fellows, who will give us more than we want to do if they come up with us, our game must be to keep out of sight. We can’t run much further in this direction, for the river will stop us; so that the best thing we can do is——”

Here Egan turned like a flash and jumped as far as he could toward the middle of the creek. The water was deep enough to let him down out of sight, but he arose to the surface almost imme-

diately, and struck out for the opposite shore. Don was astonished, but he did not hesitate an instant to "follow his leader." Settling his cap firmly on his head, he dove from the bank, and swimming rapidly under the water, passed Egan, much to that young gentleman's surprise, and came up a long way ahead of him. A few long, steady strokes carried them across the stream, and while they were climbing out by the aid of the bushes that hung over the water, voices and footsteps sounded from the bank they had just left, and presently ejaculations indicative of the greatest amazement came to their ears, followed by ringing peals of laughter.

"Ha ! ha ! ha ! I say, you, Egan—ha ! ha ! ha ! and Gordon—O, dear, O, dear ! This will be the death of me, I just know—ha ! ha ! Halt !" was the command that was shouted at them from the other side of the creek ; and looking over their shoulders they saw on the bank a party of their pursuers, some of whom stamped about and flourished their arms over their heads as if they were fighting off a swarm of bumblebees, while the others rolled on the ground or stood in a crouching attitude, holding their hands

firmly against their sides. They were all convulsed with laughter, and the corporal who commanded the squad, and who thought he had never before seen so ludicrous a sight as the deserters presented in their dripping uniforms, was so completely overcome with merriment that he could not speak again. He stood there on the bank shaking his head and slapping his knees until Egan and his companion disappeared in the woods.

“Well, Gordon, what do you think of the situation?” asked the sergeant, throwing himself flat on his back and holding his feet aloft so that the water could run out of his boots.

“I’m seeing lots of fun,” answered Don, wiping the tears from his eyes; for he had laughed as heartily as any of the corporal’s men. “But do you think we can get through?”

“We must get through,” replied the sergeant, earnestly. “If we should be caught and taken back after what we have done, the boys never would quit joking us. That corporal is a good fellow to keep out of the way of. He’s as sharp as any detective, as fleet as an antelope, and if he once gets a grip on a deserter’s collar, he don’t let

up. He's a bad one, and if he isn't recalled, he will follow us all over the country."

"If he is as persevering as that, what's the reason he did not swim the creek in pursuit of us?" asked Don.

"He wouldn't have made anything by it," answered the sergeant, "and, besides, he wouldn't care to go tramping about the country in his wet clothes. He will follow a better plan than that. He will cross at the bridge and go over to the main road and try to ambush us. You see if he don't."

Having wrung a little of the water out of their clothes, Don and his companion continued their flight, threading their way rapidly but cautiously through the thick woods; but before they had gone two hundred yards, the sergeant, who was acting as guide, stopped all on a sudden and pointed silently before him. Don looked and saw that they had barely escaped running into an ambuscade that had been prepared for them. Having crossed the creek at the bridge, corporal Mack and his men had made the best of their way to the main road and were now hidden in the bushes on each side of it, awaiting the approach of the

deserters. Don could see their uniform caps, and he counted a dozen of them in all.

“Mack knows that we are going to the show, and he will exert himself to the utmost to prevent it,” said the sergeant, after he and Don had made a wide detour and safely passed the ambushade. “We must hurry on now, for we are not safe so long as we wear these uniforms.”

It would have been much easier walking in the main road, which was in plain sight of them, but the sergeant dared not follow it, for he and Don were in no condition, weighed down as they were by their wet clothing, to engage in a foot-race with the fleet and persevering corporal, who would be sure to see them the moment they came out of their concealment. So they kept to the bushes, and at the end of a quarter of an hour came to a halt in the rear of a snug little farm-house, which was the home of one Asa Peters, who had agreed, for a suitable consideration, to furnish them with disguises whenever they might stand in need of them. Asa was chopping wood in the back yard, and Egan had no difficulty in attracting his attention. Hearing his name pronounced in a cautious tone, Asa threw down his axe, and

after looking all around to make sure that his movements were not observed, he climbed the fence and joined the deserters behind the smoke-house, where they had stopped for concealment. He was a stalwart young rustic with a red head, a peaked nose, and a freckled face—very homely, in short, but with a most exalted opinion of his personal appearance.

“I say, Asa,” said Egan, hurriedly. “We want those clothes now. Is there any way for us to get into the house without being seen?”

Asa leaned against the smoke-house and twirled his thumbs, but said nothing. •

“What’s the matter?” asked Egan, in some alarm. “You are not going back from your word, are you? You agreed to furnish each of us with a suit of your clothes for a dollar apiece, and we expect you to live up to your bargain.”

“Wal,” drawled Asa. “You see—Sally, she——”

He blushed and hesitated.

“Well, go on; what about Sally?” asked Don, impatiently. “She doesn’t want to borrow your clothes, does she?”

“Eh? No,” said Asa, indignantly. “But she

wants to go to the show, an' how am I goin' to take her when I aint got no duds to go in? That's what's been a botherin' me. An', you see, if I don't take her, 'Bijah Sawin will."

"Well, let 'Bijah have her," said Don.

"Not by a long shot."

Asa glared savagely at Don as he said this, and brought his fist down into his open palm with a sounding whack. The idea of allowing a rival to walk off with his sweetheart was not to be entertained for a moment. Don looked blank; but Egan, who had had dealings with Asa before, thought he knew a sure road to his heart.

"Now, Asa," said he, coaxingly, "listen to me for a moment. I know that Sally is a beauty (Egan had never seen the girl in his life), but there are plenty of others in the world who are just as handsome, and a dashing, good-looking young fellow like yourself can always take his pick."

Asa stroked the yellow down on his chin and grinned complacently.

"Besides, we'll make it worth your while to stick to your bargain," continued Egan, closely watching the effect of his words. "We will

give you a dollar extra for the use of your clothes."

Asa opened his eyes and looked interested.

"We mean by that, a dollar extra for the use of each suit," put in Don. "And if you want it, we will pay you half the money in advance."

It was evident from the expression on the face of Asa Peters that there was a severe conflict going on in his mind—a conflict between his love of money and his deep-rooted affection for Sally; but avarice conquered at last, and without saying a word Asa climbed the fence and led the way toward the house, followed by the deserters, who exchanged many a wink, and laughed silently at the boy who was willing to give up his sweetheart for two dollars.

Asa led the deserters up the back stairs and into his room, whose front window, which was open, looked out upon the road. While he was taking from his trunk his cherished wearing apparel, the judicious selection of which had occasioned him infinite trouble and perplexity, Don glanced out at the window and saw Corporal Mack and his men approaching.

"I declare, Egan," said he, "we're cornered."

“O, no,” said the latter, who was making all haste to get out of his wet uniform. “Mack doesn’t know that we are here, and even if he suspected it, he has no right to search the house.”

Having placed his best suits of clothes in orderly array upon the bed (the deep sighs he uttered while he was thus engaged proved that Sally was not yet wholly forgotten), Asa seated himself on his trunk and looked out of the window, while Don and his companion proceeded to put on their disguises. And disguises they proved to be in every sense of the word. It is doubtful if even the sharp eyes of Corporal Mack could have penetrated them. The boys looked for all the world like a couple of green country fellows who were out for a holiday ; and when Don, after disarranging his hair, and assuming an expression of countenance that would have done credit to Mark Twain’s “Inspired Idiot,” walked across the floor after the manner of a plantation darkey, Egan, who never could control himself when he wanted to laugh, rolled on the bed convulsed with merriment. Nothing but the near approach of Corporal Mack and his men kept him from shouting at the top of his voice.

"Look here, Gordon," said he, as soon as he could speak. "No more of that. You will give us away, sure. Mack is a Southern boy, and he knows the negro style of progression as well as you do. So mind what you are about."

Just then the clear tones of Corporal Mack sounded under the window. "Hallo, Asa," said he. "Seen any of our boys around here lately?"

"Wal, yes," drawled Asa, in reply. "I seed a power of 'em yesterday."

"Have you seen any of them to-day?"

"Wal, yes; but I seed a right smart sprinklin' of 'em yesterday."

"Don't say that again, Asa," whispered Egan, excitedly. "If you do you will let the cat out of the bag, sure. That boy is sharper than a steel trap, and you must be careful how you talk to him."

"You say you have seen some of our boys to-day," continued the corporal. "Were their names Egan and Gordon? I thought so. Well, where are they now?"

"I don't rightly know *jest* where they be," answered Asa; and he didn't either, for his

back was turned toward the two boys in question.

"I see very plainly that there is nothing to be gained by questioning you," said the corporal, whose suspicions had been aroused. "You know where those two fellows are, and when you see them again you may tell them that we are going to the show, too."

Asa said he would, and the corporal and his squad moved off.

"What did I tell you?" exclaimed Egan. "Didn't I say that if he wasn't recalled, he would follow us all over the country? Now, let's be moving. We'll keep out of sight as much as possible until we reach the village, and after we have got into the crowd, we shall be comparatively safe. But remember this: If you are separated from me by any mischance, dodge every fellow in uniform you see, no matter whether he wears a bayonet by his side or not. Even Hop and Curtis would report us to the corporal if they should see and recognize us."

Don had never engaged in an undertaking that was more to his liking. It was one that required the exercise of all the skill and cunning he

possessed, and he had the satisfaction of knowing that while he was working to the utmost to accomplish his object, he was violating no rule, and was in no danger of being taken to task when he returned to camp.

Having paid Asa a portion of the money they had agreed to give him for the use of his clothes, Don and his companion made the best of their way toward Bridgeport, which was filled to overflowing with people from the surrounding country who had flocked in to see the sights. They mingled with the crowd and acted their parts as rustics to perfection. They gazed with open mouth and eyes at every thing they saw, munched apples and gingerbread as they walked along, and tried to beat down the price of candy as often as they stopped to purchase. They went into all the side-shows to see the curiosities on exhibition, and manfully bore their part in the crush and jam that took place when the ticket-wagon was opened.

Up to this time they had succeeded in keeping out of the way of their fellow-students, all of whom, having been warned by the corporal, were keeping a sharp look-out for them ; but now they

ran against some of them almost before they knew it. Having secured their tickets after a terrific struggle, they moved with the crowd toward the entrance to the "grand pavilion," and all on a sudden found themselves face to face with four of the corporal's men. Don and his friend knew that they belonged to Mack's squad, for they wore bayonets by their sides to show that they were on duty. They stood two on each side of the entrance, and looked closely at everybody who went in. The situation was growing interesting; and it grew still more interesting before the afternoon was over, and some of the village people afterward declared that Don and Corporal Mack furnished the best part of the entertainment.

"Now for it, Gordon," said Egan, in an excited whisper. "See how they stare at everybody. That proves that they either know or suspect that we are disguised. It would be a pity if we were to be gobbled right here in the presence of all these people. How everybody would laugh at us!"

But both the boys were equal to the emergency. Egan, trusting entirely to his disguise,

kept straight ahead without looking at the sentries, while Don, throwing all the stupidity he could into an unusually intelligent countenance, gazed about him with a frightened air, and clung to his friend's coat-tails as if he were afraid of being lost. That move came very near being fatal to them. Egan laughed audibly, in spite of himself, and hurried on, dragging Don after him ; while the four guards exchanged significant glances, and one of them hurried out to find Corporal Mack. The deserters did not know it, but from that moment they were under surveillance.

Having taken a look at the animals they went into the second tent, picked out a good seat, invested a portion of their pocket-money in peanuts, and waited patiently for the performance to begin. They did not pay much attention to the stale jokes of the clowns, but they were really interested in the riding and leaping—so much so that they did not notice that Corporal Mack was improving the opportunity to station his men so that they could not escape. Finally the trick mule was brought in, and after he had gone through with his antics and thrown the darkey

who tried to ride him, some of the spectators went out, while those who had purchased tickets for the musical entertainment, moved over to the other side of the tent. Among the latter were Don and Egan.

By this time Don had the satisfaction of knowing that he had made himself an object of interest to the people about him, who told one another that he was the greenest specimen of a country boy they had ever seen. When he moved with the rest over to the opposite side of the tent, he could not resist the temptation to give a specimen of old Jordan's style of locomotion; and he did it so perfectly that he excited the laughter of some and the sincere pity of others, who believed that that was his usual way of walking. There was one, however, who was keeping a sharp eye on all his movements, and who was not deceived—a spruce young soldier, who elbowed his way through the crowd, and, to the surprise of everybody, laid hold of the young countryman's collar.

“That's most too attenuated,” said he, with a laugh. “No white fellow ever had so outlandish a gait. Gordon, I know you, and I have come for you, too.”

Corporal Mack had never yet failed to capture the deserter of whom he had been sent in pursuit. He was noted for his grip, he had confidence in it, and when he placed his hand on Don's collar he thought he had him, sure ; but, as it happened, he didn't know the boy he was trying to arrest.

Don wheeled as quick as thought, tore himself lose from the detaining hand and took to his heels, darting like a flash through the crowd of spectators who, astonished beyond measure to see the awkward clown, who had moved so slowly and painfully over the ground, suddenly transformed into a fleet-footed runner, parted right and left to give him room, and cheered him lustily as he passed through their ranks. Corporal Mack started in hot pursuit. His men, who had been stationed around the outside of the tent, drew in upon the fugitive from all sides ; while Egan, seeing that no attention was paid to himself, crawled through between the seats, raised the canvas and took himself safely off.

It was an amusing as well as an exciting race that came off in that tent that afternoon, and the shouts of laughter and yells of encouragement that arose on all sides were almost deafening.

Don, in his ill-fitting clothes and big cowhide boots, looked clumsy enough, but he got over the ground at an astonishing rate. Seeing that every way of escape, except one, was closed against him, he dashed straight across the ring toward the seats that had just been vacated. He ascended to the topmost one in half a dozen jumps, and diving through the opening between the top of the tent and the side, he dropped lightly to the ground and continued his flight, the cheers and laughter of the amused spectators ringing in his ears as he went.

There were two long freight trains standing on the railroad track, which was close at hand. Toward these Don bent his steps, intent on getting out of sight as soon as possible ; and without pausing to consider the risk he ran in so doing, he crawled under one of the cars to the opposite side of the track. Corporal Mack followed him without loss of time ; but when he arose to an upright position, after crawling under the car, Don was not to be seen. He was dodging about among the freight-houses ; and after a twenty minutes' run, having, as he believed, placed a safe distance between himself and his pursuers, he sat down on the edge of the sidewalk

to take a rest. Pulling Asa's big red handkerchief from his pocket and mopping his dripping forehead vigorously, he broke out into a cheery laugh, and was surprised as well as startled to hear it echoed close by.

"Well, my young friend, you seem to be in good humor," said a pleasant voice.

Don looked up and saw before him an old gentleman leaning on his cane and beaming at him over his gold spectacles.

"Yes, sir," said he, respectfully, at the same time imitating Asa's drawl. "I've been to the show."

"Ah! indeed. And you saw the clowns, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, but I didn't care for them. I seen the tigers and the elephants and the boy-constructors and all them things; and I seen that there mu-el throw that there nigger——"

Here Don went off into another paroxysm of laughter. The old gentleman laughed too and passed on, marveling greatly at the boy's innocence, and wondering where in the world he came from.

After taking time to cool off a little and to

recover his breath, Don got upon his feet and walked away. All the fun was over now so far as the show was concerned. His disguise being known, it would be dangerous for him to stay about the village, and the only thing he could do was to go back to the home of Asa Peters, where he hoped to find his friend Egan.

“I hope he wasn’t captured,” thought Don, “for I should find it very lonely roaming about the woods all by myself. Besides, I don’t know where those trout-streams are that he said would afford us so much sport. There’s one thing about it: I am out, and I shall not go back until I get ready.”

Don would doubtless have been very much surprised if any one had told him that when he got ready to go back to camp he would not be allowed to do so; but such was the case, as he found when he made the attempt.

Just before dark Don came within sight of Asa’s home. As he was hurrying along the road, not dreaming of danger, he heard a familiar voice calling to him; and looking in the direction from which it came, he saw his missing friend Egan snugly hidden away among the bushes in a fence-

corner. When he saw that he had attracted Don's attention he broke out into a hearty peal of laughter.

"You're a good one, Gordon," said he, "and I would give something to know how Corporal Mack feels over his failure to make a prisoner of you. I never knew a boy to get away before when once Mack got a good grip on his collar, and neither did I ever see No. 10 cowhide boots climb over the ground so rapidly. You have done something worth boasting of."

"What are you doing there?" asked Don.

"Waiting for you. Come over here. I struck out for this place as soon as I could get out of the tent," said the sergeant, as Don climbed the fence, "hoping to secure possession of our uniforms before the corporal could get here; but he and his men hired a wagon and a span of horses and got ahead of me."

"Do you mean to say that they are guarding the house now?" exclaimed Don.

"Certainly I do, and you would have run right into their clutches if I hadn't been here to warn you. They'll get supper and sleep there to-night, and we must look elsewhere for grub and lodging.

Asa will be in a fearful way about his good clothes, but we can't help that. We can't get our uniforms while Mack is prowling around."

Egan, who was well acquainted in the neighborhood, had no difficulty in finding food and shelter for himself and his companion. Another farm-house opened its hospitable doors to them, and there they passed the night, setting out bright and early the next morning to try one of the trout-streams of which Egan had spoken. Late in the afternoon they secured an interview with Asa, who, after telling them that Corporal Mack had been recalled that morning, growled lustily at them for keeping his clothes so long. In order to silence him and make sure of other disguises in future, in case they should need them, they gave him an extra dollar, and paid his mother the same amount for drying and pressing out their uniforms.

During the next two days the deserters thoroughly enjoyed themselves, living on the fat of the land, and catching as many fish as they could dispose of. On the afternoon of the third day they began to talk of returning to camp. They took supper with Asa that night, and as

soon as darkness came to conceal their movements they set out for the works, hoping to creep by the sentries and reach the shelter of their tents without arousing anybody, thus winding up their exploits in the most approved style ; but they did not get into the camp as easily as they thought they would. While they were passing through a piece of thick woods on their way to the bridge, they were suddenly surrounded by a multitude of dark forms which seemed to rise out of the ground on all sides of them, and before they could resist or cry out, they were seized by strong hands and hurried away through the darkness.

CHAPTER XIII.

A NIGHT ATTACK.

“SQUAD, halt ! No. 4.”

It was Thursday afternoon, and the relief was going its rounds. When his number was called Bert Gordon stepped forward, and holding his musket at “arms port,” prepared to receive the orders which the sentry whom he was about to relieve had to pass, while the two corporals stood by and listened.

“My instructions are to stop anybody who may attempt to go out of the lines without a pass, and to keep a good lookout for prowlers,” said the sentry.

“For prowlers !” echoed Bert. “What is the meaning of that order ?”

“I give it up,” replied the sentry. “I pass the command to you just as it was given to me. If you see anybody prowling about on the other side of the creek, call the corporal.”

The sentry fell into place in the rear of the

squad, and the relief passed on, leaving Bert alone on his post.

"Prowlers," he repeated, over and over again. "I don't understand it. Why should there be any more danger from prowlers now than at any other time? O!" he added, an idea suddenly occurring to him. "Perhaps they think that Don and Egan will try to work their way back to camp this afternoon. Well, if they do, they'll not get by *me*."

So saying, Bert settled his musket firmly on his shoulder and began pacing his beat, casting suspicious and searching glances now and then toward the bushes on the opposite side of the creek.

When Bert first learned that his brother and Egan had deserted the camp he was almost overwhelmed with surprise and mortification. He supposed they had committed a serious offence, one that would be sure to bring disgrace and punishment upon them, and took it so much to heart that the boys were obliged to explain matters to him. They assured him that the deserters had not lowered their standing or forfeited the good-will of the teachers, and that all they had

to do to make heroes of themselves was to outrun or outwit the parties that were sent in pursuit of them, and make their way back to camp without being caught.

"They are heroes already," said one of the students, with great enthusiasm, "for didn't they swim the creek during their flight? That's something that none of the fellows ever did before. I wish they might get back all right, but the superintendent has sent Mack after them, and he's a bad one. He's bound to catch them."

This seemed to be the opinion of all the students; and consequently when Corporal Mack returned to camp and reported that he had found Don Gordon at the show disguised as a country boy, and had actually had his hand on his collar, and Don had broken away and beaten him in a fair race, notwithstanding the fact that he was incumbered by heavy boots that were many sizes too large for him—when the corporal reported all this, the boys were not a little surprised.

"It would have made you laugh to see him," said the corporal, who had the greatest respect for the boy who had so neatly outwitted him. "He looked and acted so much like a born sim-

pleton that I couldn't make up my mind that it was Don Gordon until he revealed his identity by walking like a field-negro. Then I knew in a moment that he was the fellow I wanted, and I—well, I didn't get him, but I *would* have got him if I hadn't been recalled. He had a suit of Asa Peter's clothes on, and I had Asa's house guarded so that he couldn't get his uniform."

Why he had been recalled so soon, and at a time too when he had the deserters "just where he wanted them," the corporal could not imagine; and neither could the rest of the students understand why their liberty had been stopped so suddenly. On the day following that on which the seven-elephant railroad show had pitched its tent in Bridgeport all passes had been refused, and since that time no one had been outside the gates except the mess-cooks. They were permitted to go to the spring three times every day, and they always went under guard too. Such a regulation had never been established before, and the students were at a loss to know the meaning of it.

"It's all Gordon's fault and Egan's," said one of the boys. "They have shown that a fellow can desert under the eye of a sentry, if he sees fit

to do so, and the superintendent is afraid that some of us will follow their example. That's the reason he sends a guard with the mess-cooks when they go to the spring after water."

"There's where you are mistaken," said one of the first-class sergeants, in reply. "We are in the enemy's country——"

The boys who were standing around laughed uproariously, and turning on their heels, walked away. They had heard quite enough of such talk as that, and wanted to know some good reason for the stopping of their liberty.

While Bert Gordon paced his beat on this particular afternoon, he kept one eye directed toward the bushes on the opposite side of the creek, and the other turned toward the camp. The huge tent that had been erected the day before for the accommodation of visitors, was already pretty well filled; and from his lofty perch on the embankment Bert could see his school-fellows strolling about in company with their parents, or with their brothers and sisters, who had come hundreds of miles to see the students in their summer quarters. Every now and then one of the village hacks would drive in at the south gate and deposit

a load of ladies and gentlemen before the door of the superintendent's marquee. Every train that steamed up to the station brought a fresh influx of visitors, and finally the camp began to present quite a holiday appearance.

"Don't I wish that my father and mother were among them!" thought Bert, who began to feel lonely when he saw that almost every boy who was off duty had hastened to the tent to receive some relative or friend who had come there to see him. "If they didn't live so far away they would certainly be here; but, as it is——"

Bert suddenly stopped, and shading his eyes with his hand, looked intently at something on the other side of the creek. He was certain that the bushes toward which he directed his gaze, were suddenly and violently agitated, as if some heavy body were working its way through them. A moment later something that looked like a head crowned with feathers was thrust cautiously into view; then a dark brown face appeared and a pair of glittering eyes looked straight at him.

"What in the world is that?" muttered Bert, after he had winked hard and looked again to

make sure that he had not been deceived. "It can't be a head, and yet—it *is* a head and nothing else. Corporal of the guard No. 4!"

The head, or whatever it was, bobbed down out of sight in an instant, and presently the corporal came hurrying up.

"There's something or other over there in the bushes," began Bert, in response to the non-commissioned officer's inquiries.

"And it looked like a head with feathers on it, I suppose," interrupted the corporal, with some impatience in his tones. "I don't see what is the matter with everybody this afternoon. You are the third one who has called me out for nothing."

"But I didn't call you out for nothing," protested Bert. "My eyes never went back on me yet, and I know that there is somebody over there in the bushes."

"I don't dispute that. It is probably your brother or Egan who is watching for a chance to creep by some of you sentries."

"But they wouldn't have feathers on their heads, would they?" demanded Bert.

"O, get out!" exclaimed the corporal. "You

didn't see any feathers. You only dreamed it."

"Do you suppose that I have been asleep?" cried Bert.

"It looks like it, for I declare I don't see how any boy who is wide awake—Well, well, have it your own way," said the corporal, who noticed that Bert's cheek began to flush and his eye to sparkle as if he were growing indignant. "Just keep your eye on him and see that he doesn't get into camp; that's all you've got to do. But I say, Gordon, we are in for a good time to-night, are we not? Did you ever see so many visitors before?"

"I never did," answered Bert. "This is my first camp, you know."

"Well, fellows who have been here during four camps say that they never saw such a crowd at this stage of the proceedings," continued the corporal. "Our friends generally put in an appearance a day or two before we break camp, and stay with us during the examination and over commencement; and what it was that brought them here so early in the day this year, I can't imagine. But we are glad to see them

all the same, and we're going to have a smashing hop to-night. Some of the fellows have sent to town for the music."

"You didn't hear anybody inquiring for me, did you?" asked Bert, with some hesitation.

"I did not. In fact, I didn't hear anybody asked for. I took time to kiss my mother and say 'hallo' to my big brother, and that's all the visiting I can do until I go off duty. Good-by, but don't call me out to look at any more feathers unless you can show them to me."

"I saw them, I know I did," said Bert, to himself, as the sentry walked away. "No one can make me believe that I could be so badly fooled in broad daylight. I wish I could have another look at them."

Once more Bert turned his eyes toward the opposite bank of the stream; but the head with the crown of feathers did not again show itself, and he finally resumed his walk, feeling very lonely and homesick. Almost every boy in camp had company—in fact he could not see a single student wandering about alone—but no one had been heard to ask for him. He would have been glad to see anybody from

Rochdale. Even the sight of Dan Evans's tan-colored face would have been most welcome.

Bert stood his time out without seeing anything more of the feathers, and finally the relief came around. Having stacked their muskets in the guard-tent the sentries, some of whom had received notice of the arrival of their friends, scattered in all directions, leaving Bert alone. He strolled slowly along the street, lifting his cap whenever he met a fellow-student accompanied by his mother or sister, and finally reached the door of his own tent, which was crowded with the relatives and friends of his mess-mates. He was about to pass on with a word of apology, when a lady, whom he did not see until that moment, arose from the camp-chair in which she was sitting, and a second later Bert was clasped in the arms of his mother. General Gordon was there, too. He had been visiting with his old friend and preceptor, the superintendent, and was now looking over the fortifications in company with Mr. Egan, Mr. Hopkins, and Mr. Curtis, all of whom were veteran soldiers. He came into the

tent in a few minutes, and when he had greeted Bert warmly, he asked for Don.

"I'm sorry to say that I don't know where he is," replied Bert, who then went on to give a hurried history of Don's exploits at the show, as reported by Corporal Mack. Mrs. Gordon listened with a shade of anxiety on her face, but the general laughed heartily.

"Boys will be boys," said he. "And so long as Don doesn't break any of the rules of the school, or carry his fun too far, where is the harm? The superintendent thinks that he and Egan have played their parts as deserters very well, and I think so, too. I should like very much to see him, but I suppose I shall have to wait until he gets ready to come in."

"You will not go home until you do see him, will you?" said Bert.

"O, no. We shall not return to Mississippi until you and Don can go with us, and then we shall have company. Young Egan, Hopkins, and Curtis are to spend a month at our house. I have just been talking with their fathers about it."

Bert was delighted to hear that this matter

had been definitely settled, and he wished that Don had been there to hear it too. He little dreamed that his brother and Egan, who were at that very moment laying their plans for getting into camp, were destined to be way-laid and taken captive by those who had every reason for holding fast to them; but such was the fact.

As Bert was to be off duty until midnight he had ample opportunity to visit with his father and mother. He walked about the fortifications with them, told them amusing and interesting stories of his life at the academy, and ate supper with them in the big tent. When all had satisfied their appetites with the good things that had been provided for them, the tables were taken out, the Chinese lanterns that hung suspended from the wires overhead were lighted, the music struck up and the dancing began. Everybody, young and old, seemed bent on having a good time, and the fun grew fast and furious. For an hour everything passed off smoothly, and then there came a most unexpected and alarming interruption—the ringing report of a musket, fol-

followed by a yell so loud and unearthly that it made the cold chills creep over every one who heard it. The music ceased, and the dancers stood still in their places and looked at one another. There was a moment's hush, and then a whole chorus of blood-curdling yells, such as no one in that company had ever heard before, rang out on the still air. They seemed to come from all sides of the camp, and their effect was most startling. The ladies screamed and ran to their husbands for protection; the gentlemen stood irresolute, each one gazing inquiringly into the face of his neighbor, and the students were thrown into a stupor from which they were quickly aroused by the roll of the drum, and loud cries of "Fall in! Fall in!"

"O, my boy, you mustn't go out there," exclaimed Mrs. Gordon, as Bert dashed forward to obey the order. Her face was very white, and she clung to her husband for support.

"Let him go," said the general. "If he has any pluck at all, now is the time for him to show it."

He did not know what the matter was—there were few in that camp who did—but he

was a soldier. When he was in the service he had yielded prompt and willing obedience to every order given him by his superiors, no matter how great the danger he might incur by so doing, and he wanted his boys to do the same thing. Bert proved that he had inherited a goodly share of his father's courage, for, although he was badly frightened, he lost not a moment in obeying the order to fall in. He ran into the guard-tent and seized his musket; but, to his great surprise, he found that the bayonet that belonged to it was gone. In fact the bayonets were all gone, and the pieces were stacked by the ramrods. Utterly at a loss how to account for this, Bert caught up the weapon and ran to join his company, which was forming on the street in front of its own tents.

"Fall in!" commanded the boy captain. "Right dress!—Front! Order arms!—Fix bayonets!"

These orders were promptly obeyed—all except the last. When the young soldiers came to feel for their bayonets, they discovered that their scabbards were empty. Before anybody

could ask the meaning of this, an orderly hurried up with instructions for the captain to move his company by the left flank, and take up a position in reserve, so as to protect the big tent and its occupants.

All this while those hideous yells had been arising on all sides, and now they were accompanied by the discharge of fire-arms. These discharges rapidly increased in number and frequency, until it seemed as if the camp were surrounded by a wall of flame; and still nobody knew what was the matter. As Bert's company wheeled into position the first company went by, moving at double time, and disappeared in the darkness; and a few moments later, rapid platoon firing sounded in the direction of the bridge. Then the students began to understand the matter.

"It's a sham fight," said the boy who stood at Bert's elbow.

"But who are our assailants?" asked the latter, who was greatly relieved.

That was a question the boy could not answer, but Bert was able to answer it for himself a few minutes later. The fight at the bridge increased

in fury, and the first company, finding its position there untenable, was ordered to fall back so that the artillery could have a chance to come into play. Encouraged by this retrograde movement the enemy rushed across the bridge in overwhelming numbers, pressing the young soldiers so closely that the retreat, which was begun in good order, very speedily became a rout. The old German professor, highly excited, ran up, sword in hand, and made frantic appeals to them to stand their ground and defend the gate ; but the ranks were hopelessly broken. They came pell-mell through the tents and took refuge behind Bert's company, the members of which were thunderstruck. What kind of an enemy was it anyhow, they asked themselves, that could throw the well-drilled boys of the first class into such confusion as this ?

“ Young shentlemens,” exclaimed the professor, flourishing his sword angrily over his head, “ I been ashamed of you. Such fighting is von grand disgrace to the Pridgebort Military Academy. Captain Bumroy,” he added, turning to the commander of Bert's company, “ go ahead and sweep the enemy from the face of the earth. Make good piziness now.”

Captain Pomeroy and his men went about this work as if they were in earnest. Holding their muskets at "arms port" they advanced in good order, and when they reached the end of their company street, they found out who the enemy were. They were Indians — veritable Indians, hideously painted and dressed in all sorts of odd costumes. They had gained a footing inside the works, and were engaged in pulling down the tents preparatory to carrying them off. Excited as Bert was, he could nevertheless calmly recall some of the incidents of the afternoon.

"Now I know the meaning of that order regarding prowlers," said he to himself. "I *did* see somebody in the bushes with feathers on his head, and it was one of these Indians who was reconnoitering our position."

Being interrupted in the work of stealing the tents, the Indians advanced in a body, brandishing their weapons and yelling with all the power of their lungs. They hoped, no doubt, to frighten Captain Pomeroy and his men, create a panic among them, and, having scattered them, to take some of them prisoners; but in this they failed. The boys were so very much in earnest,

and so fully determined to save their tents, that they came very near changing the sham fight into a real fight. Now Captain Pomeroy saw why it was that the teachers had taken the precaution to remove the bayonets. If his men had been provided with those dangerous weapons, he would have charged the Indians without an instant's hesitation, and there was no telling what the young soldiers might have done in their excitement.

"Steady!" commanded the boy captain.
"Butts to the front! Strike!"

The order was obeyed with the greatest alacrity. Raising a yell, the boys rushed upon the Indians, and if the latter had stood their ground, there would have been a fight, sure. But fortunately they broke and ran. The captain followed them as far as the gate, and then drawing his men up in platoon front, opened a hot fire of blank cartridges on the bridge.

"Vell done, Captain Bumroy," said the German professor, who had kept a sharp eye on the whole proceeding. "Vell done. Ven you been in my good Brussia and fights like dot in a true pattle, you gets a decoration from the Emperor.

Aha ! Now stay here, and don't let them red fellows come in some more."

Meanwhile the rest of the battalion had not been idle. The battery had been in almost constant use ; the first platoon of the second company had successfully defended the south gate ; and the second platoon, assisted by the third company, had held the rest of the works, repulsing every charge that had been made upon them. The artillery roared, small arms popped, the threatening war-whoops of the Indians were answered by yells of defiance from the boy soldiers—in short, there was nothing wanting to make a real fight of it except bullets and bayonets. This state of affairs continued for half an hour, during which the different companies were handled just as they would have been in action, and then the firing ceased as suddenly as it had begun. The battle was over. Just then an orderly from headquarters stepped up and saluted Captain Pomeroy.

"The superintendent presents his compliments and requests that you will keep a lookout for a delegation from the Indian camp," said he. "Should any appear, you will receive it and send it to the big tent under guard."

The young captain at once detailed a corporal's guard to wait at the bridge and escort the expected delegation inside the lines ; and scarcely had the squad disappeared before it came in again, accompanied by half a dozen stately Indians, who were closely wrapped up in their blankets. They were fine-looking fellows, in spite of their feathers and paint, and if they had been entering a hostile camp they could not have behaved with more dignity and seriousness.

"What do you want?" demanded Captain Pomeroy.

"Want to see big chief," grunted one of the Indians, in reply.

"Have you any weapons about you?" inquired the captain, recalling the stratagem to which Pontiac resorted when he tried to capture Detroit.

The Indians shook their heads, but the captain, as in duty bound, ordered them to be searched ; after which he told his first lieutenant to take command of the squad, and to conduct the visitors to the big tent. Then, as there was no danger to be apprehended so long as the delegation was in camp, he placed a guard at the gate, and allowed the rest of his men to stack arms and sit down on

the grass. At the end of half an hour, two of the Indians came back, guarded by the lieutenant and his squad, and accompanied by the officer of the day.

“Captain Pomeroy,” said the latter, “pass these two chiefs, and stand ready to receive them when they return.”

“Very good, sir,” replied the captain. “What did they do in the big tent, Perkins?” he asked of his lieutenant, as soon as the officer of the day had retired; “and who are they, any way?”

“Why, they are Mount Pleasant Indians,” answered the lieutenant, who, during his absence, had had opportunity to talk with some of the boys in the first class who knew all about the matter. “They are principally farmers and mechanics; but there are one or two professional men among them—school teachers and the like.”

“Well, I declare!” exclaimed the captain. “They haven’t forgotten how to give the war-whoop if they are civilized, have they? Of course this night’s work was a put-up job?”

“Certainly it was. The superintendent wanted to do something to amuse us, so he went out to their reservation, which is about twenty miles from

here, and easily induced the head-chief to promise to bring in three hundred of his young men on a certain night and make an attack on us. Then he wrote to our parents; and that's what brought this crowd here to-day."

"Ah! That explains it. But they didn't know anything about it, for I noticed that some of them were as frightened as we were. Didn't you hear the women scream? I thought the girl I was dancing with was going to faint, she turned so white. What did they do in the big tent?"

"O, they held a pow-wow there in the presence of all our guests, smoking a pipe and going through all the motions of a regular Indian peace commission. The chief made a speech (I tell you it was a good one and astonished everybody), during which he said that his young men had taken some prisoners whom he would be happy to surrender——"

"Prisoners!" repeated the captain, incredulously.

"Yes. Eight of the first-class boys are missing. You see this company was thrown into confusion when they fell back from the bridge, and

as soon as they became separated, the Indians jumped in and dragged some of them off."

"Well, they didn't serve me that way," said Captain Pomeroy, with an air of triumph. "They had the impudence to try to steal my boys' tents; but when we turned butts to the front, didn't they dig out in a hurry?"

Lieutenant Perkins, who had borne his full part in that gallant charge, said he thought they did.

CHAPTER XIV.

DON GORDON'S SHOOTING-BOX.

“WELL, what did the chief say about the prisoners?” asked Captain Pomeroy, after a moment's pause.

“O, he went through the usual formula,” answered Lieutenant Perkins. “He said he would be happy to surrender his captives if the white chief would give him and his warriors presents enough to make it an object for him to do so. The superintendent said he wouldn't do that, but if the chief would give up the prisoners and come into camp to-morrow afternoon and dance for us, he would furnish him and his warriors with all the grub they could eat. The chief finally accepted the offer, and those two Indians who went out a little while ago are to bring in the captives.”

“Who comes there?” shouted the sentry at the bridge.

"There they are now," exclaimed the lieutenant. "Corporal, go out there."

The corporal went, and presently returned accompanied by the two Indians and ten prisoners instead of eight. Bert and his companions moved up close to the gate to see who the prisoners were, and the former was astonished beyond measure to find that his brother and Sergeant Egan were marching with the squad. The boys wanted to laugh at them, but they were on duty, and they knew that such a breach of discipline would not be allowed. Led by Lieutenant Perkins and his squad, they were marched to the big tent, where the ceremony of surrendering them was gone through with; after which the Indian delegation was escorted out of the camp, Captain Pomeroy and his men were ordered to their quarters, the sentries were posted, the ranks broken, and all the young soldiers who were off duty flocked into the big tent to talk over the incidents of the fight with their guests. Bert quickly found his way to a merry group consisting of his father, mother and brother, and Egan, Hopkins and Curtis, with their fathers and mothers, all of whom were listening with interest to what the deserters had

to say regarding their experience among the Indians. When they had finished their story General Gordon said :—

“You missed it, boys. The members of your company covered themselves with glory and you have no share in it. The first company was so badly demoralized by the very first charge the Indians made that they couldn't be rallied ; while Pomeroy, with his raw recruits, as you might call them, drove the enemy from the field and saved the tents from capture.”

“It was really thrilling, Mr. Gordon,” said Egan's pretty sister, to whom Don had just been introduced, “and I never before was so badly frightened. We were not expecting anything of the kind, you know, and I could not imagine what the matter was.”

“I wouldn't have had those Indians get their hands on us for anything,” exclaimed Egan, who seemed to take the matter very much to heart. “I knew the fight was coming, and I wanted very much to take part in it. Well, it serves me right for deserting when I ought to have stayed in camp.”

It was growing late now—so late that the

dancing was not resumed. The carriages, which had been ordered for eleven o'clock, began to arrive and the guests to take their departure for Bridgeport, whose two hotels and numerous boarding-houses were taxed to the utmost to find room for them.

The next morning passes were granted by wholesale, and every boy who was able to secure one started at once for the Indian camp, which was located in a deep ravine about a mile away. The young braves drove a thriving trade in bows and arrows, and earned a snug sum of pocket money by shooting dimes and quarters out of split sticks; while the squaws sold moccasins, beaded purses and miniature birch-bark canoes by the bushel. At one o'clock the big tent was again crowded with guests, and an hour later the Indian warriors, who were all armed and freshly painted, filed silently into the works. The entertainment that followed, and which was much better than some the boys had paid twenty-five cents to witness, included the corn-dance, hunting-dance, war-dance and a scalping scene. By the time it was ended dinner had been served in the big tent. After the dancers had done full justice to it, and

had exchanged courtesies with their late antagonists by giving an ear-splitting war-whoop in return for their three cheers and a tiger, they filed out of the works as silently as they had come into them, and the students once more settled down to business.

There were no more desertions after that. Some of their friends came to see them every day, and as there were many veterans among them who watched their movements with a critical eye, of course the boys were careful to perform all their duties in a prompt and soldier-like manner. In due time the camp was broken and the students marched back to the academy, which during their absence had been thoroughly renovated. The examination was held, the members of the first class received their degrees and new officers were appointed for the coming year. Among the latter were Bert Gordon and Sam Arkwright—the former being made first sergeant of the fourth company, which was yet to be organized, and the other receiving a warrant as second corporal. Don Gordon stood head and shoulders above everybody in his class, and the only thing that prevented him from being commissioned lieuten-

ant of the new company was his record as a soldier, which, as we know, was by no means perfect.

Contrary to Dick Henderson's prediction, the school had not been disgraced by the presence of the New York boot-black. Its popularity seemed to be increasing, for the number of those who applied for admission was greater than it had ever been before ; and when the examination was over, Bert found that he had a hundred and ten names on his company roster. Dick would not have made such a prediction now, for he was different in every way from the boy we introduced to the reader at the beginning of this story. Having got out from under Clarence Duncan's baneful influence, and having Don Gordon's example and Tom Fisher's to encourage him, he was in a fair way to make a man of himself.

At length the exercises were all ended, and one bright morning Hopkins, Egan and Curtis took leave of their friends, and in company with Don and Bert Gordon and their parents, set out for Rochdale. They went fully prepared to enjoy themselves. As soon as it was settled that they

were to go home with the Gordons, they had written for their hunting rigs, which were duly forwarded to them. Walter Curtis's favorite, in fact his only, weapon, was a light Stevens rifle, with which he had broken twenty-three out of twenty-five feather-filled glass balls thrown from a revolving trap. Hopkins took pride in a short double-barrel shotgun, of large calibre, that he had often used on horseback while following deer and foxes to the music of the hounds; while Egan, who lived on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, where canvas-backs and red-heads abound, put all his faith in a ponderous ten-gauge Parker, which was so heavy that Don Gordon, strong and enduring as he was, declared that he wouldn't carry it all day through the woods if his friend Egan would make him a present of it.

"Neither would I," chimed in Hopkins.

"You!" exclaimed Egan, standing off and looking at the speaker's rotund figure. "You'd look nice starting out for an all-day tramp, *you* would. Your legs are too short, and you carry too much weight around with you. You would get out of breath before you had gone half a mile. But as I am not going to Mississippi after squir-

rels, I don't intend to tramp about the woods. Gordon promised me some duck-shooting."

"As for myself," Curtis remarked, "I always did despise a scatter-gun. A blind man ought to be able to hit a duck by sending a pound or two of shot at him——"

"Well, it's not so easy, either," interrupted Egan. "A duck, when flying down wind, moves at the rate of ninety miles an hour, old fellow, and it takes the best kind of a marksman to make a good bag."

"A true sportsman never prides himself upon the number of birds he kills, but upon the superiority of his shots," said Curtis. "When you can strike a rapidly moving object with a single ball from a rifle, then you can boast of your skill."

During the journey down the Mississippi the boys were on deck almost all the time, listening to Don, who pointed out the various places of interest along the route, adding some entertaining scraps of the history of each. Over there, on the right bank, he said, was the battle-field of Belmont; and on the opposite shore was Columbus, from which came the Confederate reinforcements that had turned the Union victory into defeat.

This was Island No. 10, where the gunboat Cincinnati distinguished herself by running the batteries, and a young master's mate, afterward the brave commander of the Champion, won his shoulder-straps by going ashore with a boat's crew, spiking some of the guns, and bringing off the wipers and spongers that belonged to them. Over there on the bluff was Fort Pillow, where that terrible massacre took place under Forrest; and this was Memphis, the scene of the fight between the Union and Confederate fleets, which resulted in the utter defeat of the latter, and in the capture of the Bragg, Price, and Little Rebel. This was Yazoo river. It was here that the Confederate ram Arkansas, after eluding the Cincinnati and whipping the Tyler, ran the fire of the whole Union fleet and took refuge under the guns of Vicksburg. Having been repaired she started down the river to raise the siege of Port Hudson, but was met and destroyed by a single Union gunboat, the Essex, under command of Captain Porter. And here was Rochdale at last. It had a history too, Don said, and he promised that he would relate it when they reached the shooting-box.

Egan and Hopkins were Southern boys, and consequently life on a plantation was not new to them ; but Curtis, who was from New England, found much to interest him, and showed himself to be a true Yankee by asking a thousand and one questions about everything he saw. Hopkins's first exploit was riding a kicking mule that Fred and Joe Packard brought out for him to try his skill upon. To the surprise of everybody Hopkins mounted in regular Texas style, placing his left hand on the mule's shoulder and throwing his right leg over his back. The moment he was firmly settled, his appearance changed as if by magic. His seat was easy and graceful, and he kept his place on that mule's back with as little trouble as he would have kept his place in a rocking chair. The animal could not move him an inch with all his kicking and plunging. The performance effectually silenced Egan, who was himself a fine horseman, and he never had anything to say about Hopkins's riding after that.

The ducks, geese, swans, and brant were already beginning to come into the lake, and on the morning of the third day following their arrival at the plantation, the young hunters, Fred and Joe

Packard being included among the number, made ready to take up their abode at the shooting-box. The canoe and sail-boat, both of which had been securely housed during the absence of their owners, were put into the water and loaded to their utmost capacity with bedding, provisions, and camp furniture. There was just room enough left in the canoe to accommodate old Cuff, the negro who was to act as cook and camp-keeper during their sojourn at the shooting-box ; and when all the boys and Don's two pointers had crowded into the sail-boat, the little craft seemed on the point of sinking. As an Irishman would have remarked, if the water in the lake had been two inches higher, she would have gone to the bottom beyond a doubt.

"We've got about three hundred pounds too much cargo aboard," said Curtis, in his quiet way. "Hop, suppose you get out and go afoot ; there's a good fellow."

"Make Egan throw his artillery overboard and we shall get on well enough," retorted Hopkins. "That's what makes the boat sink so deep in the water."

With much fun and chaffing the boys pulled

toward the point on which the shooting-box was located, and by handling their heavily loaded craft in the most careful manner, they succeeded in beaching her in safety. As her bow touched the shore, old Cuff, who landed at the same moment, uttered an exclamation indicative of the greatest astonishment. Don looked up and saw that the shooting-box was already occupied. A smoke was curling out of the stove-pipe that served for a chimney, and a rough-looking man, dressed in a tattered suit of brown jeans, stood in front of the open door, leaning on his axe. From the cabin there came the sound of voices mingled with another sound that made old Cuff almost ready to boil over with indignation.

“’Fore Moses, Mr. Don,” he exclaimed. “Somebody in dar crackin’ all de nuts dat I done pick up for you an’ your frien’s.”

“We’ll soon put a stop to that,” answered Don. “Those people, whoever they are, have no business in there, and they must get out at once.”

“Did you ever hear of such impudence?” exclaimed Bert, angrily. “Where did they come from, anyhow? They don’t belong in this part of the country.”

The man with the axe seemed as much surprised to see Don and his party as the latter were to see him. He too uttered an exclamation which brought to the door the other occupants of the cabin, seven of them in all, including two more men and three women; and very disreputable looking persons the most of them were. The other two, one of whom seemed to be entirely out of place there, did not show themselves at the door as openly as their companions did, and consequently Don and Bert did not see them. They thrust their heads out very cautiously, and as soon as they saw who the new-comers were, they drew back and made all haste to effect their escape through the window on the other side of the cabin. By keeping the building between themselves and the beach they managed to reach the cover of the woods without being observed. Don and Bert would have been very much surprised if they had seen them, for they were our old acquaintances Lester Brigham and Dan Evans. They were now almost constant companions; and how they came to be so shall be told further on.

“What do you want here?” demanded the



man with the axe, as Don walked up the bank followed by his companions.

"I think that is a proper question for me to ask you," replied Don, who did not at all like the surly tone in which he had been addressed. "This house belongs to my brother and myself, and we would thank you to vacate it without the loss of a moment."

"Wal, I reckon we shall do as we please about that," drawled one of the men who stood in the door.

"Well, I reckon you won't. You'll do as I please about it. I want possession here, and I want it now. I see you broke the lock in order to gain admittance, and you had no business to do that."

"Do you live here?" asked the man with the axe.

"I'm going to live here."

"Wal, thar's two rooms in the shantee, an' why can't you-uns take one of 'em an' let we-uns——"

"We don't want company," exclaimed Don, who was fairly staggered by the proposition. "We want you to clear out bag and baggage,

and to be quick about it, too. My father is a magistrate, and this shooting-box is on his land."

The word "magistrate" had a magical effect upon the members of the dirty group in the doorway. It put life into them, and at the same time set the women's tongues in motion. They began packing up their scanty belongings, declaring, with much vociferation, that it was a sin and a shame that they should be turned out of such snug quarters just to accommodate the whims of a party of young aristocrats who wanted to come there and shoot a few ducks. Why couldn't they go elsewhere for their ducks and leave honest people alone? That was always the way with rich folks. They didn't care how others suffered so long as they had their own pleasure. But it was a great comfort to know that it wouldn't always be so. There was a time coming, and it wasn't so very far distant either, when rich folks would be required to give up some of their ill-gotten gains.

"That sounds like communism, doesn't it?" said Curtis.

"Yes; and *that* sounds very much like incendiarism," answered Hopkins; and so it did, for

just then one of the men in the cabin was heard to say :—

“Never mind, Luke. The old shantee is dry an’ fire ’ll burn it.”

“Let them burn it if they dare,” said Bert, his slight form swelling with indignation. “I wouldn’t give a picayune for the life of the person who attempts it. Cuff,” he added, turning to the negro, “as soon as we get things straightened up here, I want you to go back to the plantation after Don’s hounds. It looks now as though we should need them.”

The tramps, if such they were, seemed to be in no hurry to leave the shooting-box. They bundled up their goods with great deliberation, abusing the boys roundly all the while, and finally came out and turned their faces toward the river. As soon as they were out of sight Don and Bert began an investigation of the premises. The cabin looked as though it had been occupied for a long time. The wood which they had provided for their own use was all gone, the stove had been copiously bedewed with tobacco juice, the floor was littered with nutshells, and everything was dingy and smoky.

"We can't live in any such looking hole as this," said Don, in deep disgust. "Cuff, build up a good fire, put on the kettle and scrub out. Let's have things neat and clean, as they used to be. Bert, suppose you take somebody with you and watch those people and see where they go."

Bert at once started off with Hopkins for a companion, and while they were gone the others employed themselves in setting things to rights. The bones, squirrel skins and turkey feathers that were scattered about in front of the door were raked into a pile and set on fire; a fresh supply of stove-wood was cut; and the boats were unloaded and their cargoes piled up outside of the cabin in readiness to be transferred to the interior as soon as the purifying process had been completed. By the time this work was done Bert and Hopkins came back.

"They're n. g. on the books—no good," said the former. "They have a little house-boat in the river——"

"That's all we want to know," interrupted Don. "They are thieves and vagabonds of the first water."

"What makes you say that?" asked Curtis.

“What’s a house-boat ? ” inquired Egan.

“I will answer the last question first,” said Don. “A house-boat is simply a scow twenty-five or thirty feet long and six or eight feet wide with a cabin amidships. This cabin takes up the whole of the boat with the exception of two or three feet at each end, where the crew stand when they are handling the lines and the steering oar. These boats are generally the property of fishermen and hunters, who float about looking for a suitable place to ply their occupation. For example, there is a house-boat in the bayou above Mound City—that’s in Illinois, you know—which has been there four or five years, its solitary occupant making a good living by trapping minks and raccoons in the winter, and catching buffalo and catfish the rest of the year.”

“Buffalo ! ” repeated Egan.

“Yes. I didn’t say bison.”

“What’s the difference ? ” asked Hopkins, who, although he was a splendid fox-hunter, was not very well posted in natural history.”

“There’s a good deal of difference, the first thing you know. A buffalo is a fish, somewhat resembling a black-bass in shape, but possessing

none of his game qualities, while a bison is an animal."

"But there are such animals as buffaloes," said Egan.

"Yes, in Africa and Asia, but not in this country. There are no partridges, pheasants, or wild rabbits here, either. As I was going on to say, this man will probably stay at Mound City until the fish and game begin to grow scarce, and then he will paddle his boat out into the current and float down the river until he finds another place that suits him. If he gets hard up for grub, he will not hesitate to visit anybody's corn-field, potato-patch, or hen-roost."

"No honest, industrious man ever lives in that way," said Bert. "The planters along the river are suspicious of these house-boats, and when they find one tied up on their premises, they always order it off."

"If these people had a shelter of their own, why did they take possession of your shooting-box?" asked Egan.

"O, for the sake of variety, probably," answered Don. "Perhaps their house was too small for them; or it may be that the roof leaked, or that

the scow was full of water. They always like to live ashore when they have the chance."

There was much to be done about the shooting-box, and the boys were kept busy all the forenoon. Old Cuff grumbled lustily while he scrubbed, declaring over and over again that Don ought to set fire to the cabin and destroy it, for it never could be made fit for white folks to live in again. After eating a substantial lunch, which was served under the trees, Egan, Hopkins, and Curtis took their guns, and, accompanied by Bert and Fred Packard, strolled along the shore of the lake to see if they could find anything for supper, while Don and Joe remained behind to assist Cuff at his work. When Egan and Curtis returned at dark, they declared that they were more than satisfied with their prospects for sport. The lower end of the lake was full of ducks, they said, and Egan had astonished his companions by bringing fourteen of them down with a single discharge of his heavy double-barrel, while Curtis had showed his skill with the rifle by shooting four ducks on the wing, and killing a swan at the distance of more than two hundred yards. They were tired as well as hungry, and glad to see the inside of

the shooting-box, which did not look now as it did when they first came there in the morning. A cheerful fire was burning in the stove, which had been blacked and polished until one could almost see his face in it ; the room was brilliantly lighted by two lamps that were suspended from the ceiling ; the floor was covered with rugs ; pictures of hunting and fishing scenes adorned the walls, and camp chairs and stools were scattered about.

In the next apartment, which was used principally as a sleeping and sitting-room, the same scene of neatness and order was presented. The wide fire-place, which occupied nearly the whole of one end of it, was piled high with blazing logs, and comfortable beds were made up in the bunks. There were pictures on the walls of this room also, rugs on the floor (some of these rugs at once attracted the attention of Egan and his friends, for they were made of the skins of bears and deer that had fallen to Don's rifle), and there were camp-chairs enough to accommodate all the boys that could crowd about the fire-place. The room looked cosey and comfortable, and the visitors no longer wondered why it was that Don thought so much of his shooting-box.

"I am going to have one of my own," said Curtis, "and it shall be modeled after this one. I shall build it this fall, so as to have it in readiness to receive you fellows when you go home with me next vacation. Now, then, where are those quails that Hop brought in? Can your darkey serve them up on toast in good shape?"

"Of course he can," answered Don. "No one can do it better; but Hop hasn't brought in any quails yet. Where did you leave him? I wondered why he didn't come home with you."

"Hasn't he returned?" exclaimed Egan. Then he's lost. We haven't seen him since two o'clock, when he coaxed your pointers away from us—we owe him a grudge for that, for we wanted the dogs to stay by us and retrieve the ducks we shot—and went over into æ field after a flock of quails he had marked down there. We heard him shoot several times after that, and as he is a good marksman, we made up our minds that we were to have quails for supper. There he is now," added Egan, as an impatient yelp sounded at the door.

"I am afraid you are mistaken," replied Don, and the sequel proved that he was; for just then

the door was thrown open, and Don's hounds, which Cuff, in obedience to Bert's orders, had brought up to guard the shooting-box, came bounding in. There were six of them, and the one which held the foremost place in Don's estimation was Carlo, the dog that had been the first to respond to his whistle when he was tied up in Godfrey Evans's potato-hole. He was an immense brute, as well as a savage one, and when he raised himself on his hind feet and placed his paws on Don's shoulders, his head was higher than his master's.

"We will keep them in here with us until Hop comes; for as they are not very well acquainted with him, they might object to his coming to the house," said Bert. "Now, Cuff, dish up a couple of those ducks in your very best style. Be in a hurry, for we are hungry."

Curtis and Egan, having exchanged their high-top boots for easy-fitting shoes, and their heavy shooting-coats for others of lighter material, set to work to clean their guns, while the rest of the boys drew their chairs up in front of the fire, and asked one another what it was that was detaining Hopkins. He couldn't get lost; they were sure

of that, for all he had to do when he wanted to come home, was to follow the shore of the lake, and he would find the shooting-box without the least trouble.

"Do you suppose he would be in any danger from those vagabond friends of ours, if he should chance to stumble upon them in the woods?" said Curtis, as he pointed his breech-loader toward the lamp and looked through the barrel to make sure that it was perfectly clean. "I must confess that I didn't quite like the looks of them."

"I never thought of them," said Don, jumping up and taking his double-barrel down from the antlers on which it rested. "I believe he would be in danger if he should meet one of those fellows in the woods, for he wears a splendid gold watch and chain, and I noticed that the man who was chopping wood when we came here this morning, looked at the chain very frequently. I think it would be a good plan to signal to him."

"Better let me do it," said Egan. "He can hear my gun farther than he can yours."

Accompanied by all the boys Egan went out on the shore of the lake and fired both barrels of his

heavy piece in quick succession ; but there was no response. Again and again the duck-gun roared, awaking a thousand echoes along the shore, but still the missing boy did not reply. When Egan had fired away all the cartridges he had brought out with him, the boys went back into the cabin and sat down and looked at one another. They began to fear that their friend's ill-luck had followed him from Bridgeport to Rochdale, and that he had got himself into some kind of a scrape.

CHAPTER XV.

LESTER BRIGHAM MAKES NEW FRIENDS.

WE said in the second chapter that after Bob Owens ran away from home to become a hunter, and Godfrey Evans and his son Dan went to work to earn an honest living, and David Evans became *mail carrier*, and Lester Brigham withdrew himself from the society of the boys in the neighborhood, the inhabitants of Rochdale and the surrounding country settled back into their old ways, and waited for something to happen that would create an excitement. Unfortunately they were not obliged to wait long.

After one has spent years of his life in idleness, he finds it an exceedingly difficult task to turn over a new leaf and make a radical and permanent change in his whole course of conduct, and Godfrey and Dan were no exceptions to this rule. So long as they worked for General Gordon, who took pains to keep a close watch over them, and to encourage them by every means in his power,

there was no fault to be found with them. They labored early and late; Godfrey, as we know, saving enough from his hard earnings to refund the money of which he had robbed Clarence Gordon on the highway, the old cabin in which they lived was repaired and refurnished, and everything seemed to be well with them; but when they had cut all the wood the general could use that year, and the latter went away on business leaving them to take care of themselves, the trouble began. They made a few feeble attempts to find more work, and in their efforts to do so they came in contact with the professional loafers about the landing, whose influence over them was anything but beneficial. The majority of them spent their time in watching the steamboats, taking part in shooting-matches and making a pretense of hunting and trapping for a livelihood; while those who had work, and were able to pay for having it done, did not want Godfrey and Dan to do it. Mr. Owens, Bob's father, was mainly responsible for this state of affairs. He had not yet got over being angry at General Gordon for putting in a bid for the mail-route when he wanted it himself, and he never allowed

an opportunity to abuse him to pass unimproved.

“Gordon seems to have taken Godfrey and his family under his protecting wing, and now he can provide for them and welcome,” Mr. Owens often said. “I want some wood cut the worst way, but I’ll see Godfrey and Dan in Jerusalem before they shall have the job. If it hadn’t been for Gordon I might have had my boy at home with me now.”

“Yes, and my boy would not have been obliged to make a hermit of himself,” Mr. Brigham would always remark when he heard Mr. Owens talking in this way. These two men had been rather distant toward each other after Mr. Brigham’s refusal to go on Bob’s bond, but they were firm friends now. They both hated General Gordon, and for nearly the same reason. Mr. Brigham had come to Rochdale with the idea that his money would at once make him the head man of the county; but in this he was most sadly disappointed. He found that the general was worth just as much, if not more than he was; that he was everybody’s friend and adviser, a member of the legislature and a candidate for

governor, and that it would be of no use for anybody to try to usurp his place. That was the reason he didn't want the general to have the contract for carrying the mail; and when he learned that the latter had influence enough to secure it without any of his help, he was greatly enraged, and felt quite as bitter toward his rich neighbor as Bob's father did.

"Never mind," said Mr. Owens. "It is a long lane that has no turning, and we shall some day be able to get square with Gordon for that piece of business. Mark my words: David Evans will sooner or later prove himself to be utterly unworthy the confidence that is placed in him. It can't be otherwise, for he is——"

Mr. Owens was about to add that David was the son of a thief as well as the brother of one; but he didn't say it, for he recollected in time that his own son was not above reproach—that he had left Rochdale having in his possession more than a hundred and sixty dollars that did not belong to him.

"Where have you fellows kept yourselves so long?" asked one of the loafers, when Godfrey and Dan once more made their appearance at the

landing, carrying their rifles on their shoulders as in the days gone by. "Been spendin' some of Dave's money in a tower to Europe? O, been cuttin' wood for Gordon, eh? Well, that's what I call nigger's work, and *I* wouldn't do it for no 'ristocrat. It's right smart easier to hunt and trap. There's going to be a power of deer and turkey this fall, and Silas Jones has agreed to pay cash for all I can bring him. He'd be willing to make the same bargain with you, I know, for he wants all he can get to ship to some commission merchant in St. Louis. He gives eight cents a pound for the deer, and sixty cents apiece for the turkeys."

"I'll just tell ye what's the gospel truth, Dannie," said Godfrey, after some of his old friends had talked to him in this way a few times. "I've got just as much right to hire somebody to chop my wood as Gordon has, an' I ain't goin' to cut no more fur him nor no other 'ristocrat. I'm goin' huntin'."

"So be I," said Dan, who was delighted at the prospect of going back to his old way of living.

"So ye shall, Dannie. We've done niggers' work long enough, an' now we'll be gentlemen

agin, like we used to be. Thar ain't no call fur you an' me to work so hard every day, when everybody else takes it so easy down thar at the landin'; an' we won't do it, neither. Here's Dave makin' a power of money, and as he ain't of age yet, every cent he 'arns ought to go into my own pocket. It shall go thar too, or I'll make a bigger furse here in the settlement nor I did afore. Gordon needn't go to pokin' his nose into the matter, either, for he won't scare me as easy as he did the last time."

"How much would a deer be worth at eight cents a pound, pap?" inquired Dan.

"Wal, that depends. If he weighed a hundred an' twenty pounds, he'd bring as much as five or six dollars, I reckon; an' if he weighed two hundred an' fifty pounds, like the one I killed three winters ago, he'd be worth fifteen, an' mebbe twenty-five dollars," answered Godfrey, who was no quicker at figures than he used to be.

"That's a heap more nor I could make chopping wood," said Dan.

"Course it is. A smart hunter like yourself oughter be able to get a deer every day, to say

nothin' of the turkeys ye might trap an' shoot. 'Sides ye'd be doin' a gentleman's work an' not a nigger's."

This conversation took place between Dan and his father one bright summer's day when they were returning home from the landing, whither they had gone under pretense of looking for work. Mrs. Evans knew there was something wrong the moment they appeared at the door, and she was not long in finding out what it was. Godfrey and Dan had worked faithfully during the whole of the winter and spring, and Mrs. Evans, although she did not see a cent of the money they earned, David being expected to look out for her comfort, began to believe that their reformation was complete, and that it would prove to be lasting; but now she learned, to her great sorrow, that she had been too hasty in coming to these conclusions. When she saw that the axes were thrown aside, and that the rifles, which had so long been idle, were daily taken down from their hooks, she knew that bad times were coming again. And they came apace, too. Godfrey and Dan seemed to have lost all their skill as hunters, for the game they brought to the landing did not

amount to much. It is true that they made some money, but it all slipped through their fingers without doing them any good, and by the time cold weather came they were as ragged and lazy as they had ever been, and just as ready to engage in any scheme that would bring them money without work.

Meanwhile Lester Brigham mustered up courage enough to come out of his retirement, and was somewhat surprised as well as vexed to learn that he might have done so long ago if he had felt so disposed, and that his voluntary banishment was entirely needless. Nobody paid much attention to him. Fred and Joe Packard, and all the other decent boys who lived in the neighborhood, greeted him pleasantly whenever they passed him on the road, and no one except the loafers at the landing had anything to say to him concerning his past conduct. These gentlemen of leisure could not resist the temptation to question him regarding that terrible bear-fight on Bruin's Island, in which he and the absent Bob had won so much renown, and now and then they reminded him that he had assisted in burning Don Gordon's shooting-box; but they did it all so

good-naturedly that Lester could not get angry at them.

“Don’s got another shantee over there on the point, and I shouldn’t be sorry to see that go up in smoke like the old one did,” a man of the Godfrey Evans stamp said to Lester one day. “’Tain’t no use to him and Bert, and by building it there they have taken the bread out of the mouths of a good many folks who live about here. As soon as school is out they’ll come home, get a party of their friends together, and kick up such a rumpus there on the lake that all the birds will be driven out of the country ; and when a poor man gets out of bacon he can’t have a duck or goose for dinner, for there won’t be any for him to shoot.”

Every time Lester Brigham rode away from the landing—he very soon fell into the habit of going there as regularly as Godfrey and Dan did—he carried with him the impression that the Gordons were not held in very high esteem, and that he and Bob Owens had the sympathy of all the best people in the settlement. Encouraged by this belief, he began making efforts to work his way into the good graces of the Packard boys, but he

failed utterly. Fred and Joe were warm friends of the Gordons, and they met his advances in so freezing a manner that Lester was highly enraged, and straightway set his wits at work to conjure up some plan for getting even with them. He wished for Bob Owens more than he had ever wished for him before (if Bob had been there he would not have joined him in any plan for mischief or revenge, for he was not that kind of a boy now); but as the only friend he had ever had since he had been in the settlement was many miles away, and Lester could no longer bear to live alone, he was forced to look for another associate—one who had plenty of time at his disposal, and who would accompany him on all his hunting and fishing excursions. He found him at last in the person of Dan Evans, who lost no time in turning their intimacy to account.

Lester, as we know, was provided with all the implements that any sportsman could possibly find use for, but he was a very poor shot, and he knew nothing whatever about hunting. He had, however, a larger amount of pocket money than he could spend in Rochdale, and whenever Dan Evans made a good bag, Lester would select from

it such birds or animals as he fancied, pay the cash for them, and carry them home to show as trophies of his own skill. Of course Dan was not just such a companion as he would like to have had, but he was better than no friend at all, and in his presence Lester could brag to his heart's content. No matter how unreasonable the story he told, Dan never disputed it or even looked incredulous. He was much too cunning for that.

"If I had the money that your brother brought my father last night, I wouldn't be here to-morrow at this time," Lester said to Dan one day. He had of late grown very tired of life in Mississippi, and was almost constantly urging his father to let him go somewhere, he didn't much care where, so long as he could find ample opportunity for recreation, and would not be required to work or study. Mr. Brigham had threatened to send him away to school if he did not leave off bothering him, and Lester was so very much afraid he would carry his threat into execution, that he began to think seriously of leaving home as his friend, Bob Owens, had done. The only thing that stood in his way was the want of money. "When the mail was distributed last night my

father got a letter with five thousand dollars in it," continued Lester. "He gets that much on the fifteenth day of every month from his agent who is selling off our property in the North."

Dan opened his eyes in great surprise. Five thousand dollars was not so large an amount as he and his father had hoped to make by digging up the barrel of gold and silver that was supposed to be buried in General Gordon's potato-patch, but still it was a lot of money—a much greater sum than Dan ever expected to earn by honest labor.

"I don't want you to say anything about it," continued Lester, "for it is my opinion that there are a good many men about here who would not be any too good to waylay Dave and rob him if they knew that he was entrusted with the care of so much money."

Dan protested that he wouldn't think of such a thing; but still the information he had received seemed to make an impression upon him, for he became very silent and thoughtful after that, and Lester could hardly get a word out of him. He seemed to have suddenly lost all interest in hunting, for he missed several fair

shots, and finally declaring that he did not feel in the humor for sport, he abruptly abandoned his companion, leaving him to continue the hunt alone or to go home, just as he pleased. An idea had suggested itself to Dan, and he wanted to get off by himself so that he could turn it over in his mind and see what he could make of it.

“Five thousand dollars,” said Dan to himself, as he hurried through the woods. “That’s a right smart chance of money, the first thing you know. And to think that our leetle Dave should have the handlin’ of it! Dave makes stacks of greenbacks by ridin’ around the country doin’ nothin’, he wears good clothes all the time, and here’s me—Dog-gone my buttons, I’ve got just as good a right to have five thousand dollars as Mr. Brigham has. I wish I was mail-carrier. I wouldn’t ask to go more’n one trip, an’ after that nobody in this country wouldn’t ever set eyes onto me again.”

Dan seemed to know where he was going and what he intended to do when he got there, for he kept straight ahead without once slackening his pace, paying no heed to the squirrels which barked at him as he hurried along, and making

his way around the foot of Diamond lake, he finally reached the levee that ran along the bank of the river. Here he found a dilapidated house-boat which had been tied up to the bank for a month or more—long enough, at any rate, for Dan to become very well acquainted with the men who owned it. He had met them while hunting in the woods, had showed them the best places to set their traps for minks and 'coons, had taken part with them in shooting-matches at the landing, and had given them information which rendered it comparatively easy for them to forage upon the hen-roosts and smoke-houses of the planters who lived in the neighborhood. They had drawn a good many secrets from the boy—one especially that they intended to use for their own benefit as soon as the opportunity was presented.

Dan walked up the plank that ran from the shore to the bow of the house-boat, and entered the cabin without ceremony. It was as dismal a hole as he had ever looked into, and Dan, accustomed as he was to gloomy surroundings, wondered how anybody could live there. It contained but one apartment, and that was used as a

kitchen, sitting-room, dining-room and bed-room. The men were lounging in their bunks, while their wives were gathered about the rusty stove puffing vigorously at their well-blackened cob-pipes. When the boat careened under Dan's weight, one of the men sprang from his bunk and made an effort to conceal a couple of chickens he had just been picking; but as soon as he saw who the visitor was, he laid them down again, for he knew he had nothing to fear.

"Mornin'. I reckon I skeered ye jest a trifle, didn't I? How wet ye be in here," said Dan, glancing at the little pools of water that filled every depression in the rough, uneven floor.

"Come in an' take a cheer, Dannie," said the man who had tried to hide the chickens, while the other two sat up in their bunks and nodded to him. "It is damp, that's a fact; but, you see, it rained powerful yesterday, the roof aint by no means as tight as it might be, an' the ole scow leaks water awful. We can't hardly keep her pumped out."

"Then what makes ye stay here?" asked Dan. "I know a nice, tight leetle house over thar on

the shore of the lake, with two big rooms into it, an' thar aint nobody lives thar."

"We've seen it; but it's locked up."

"What's the odds? Take something an' pull one of the steeples out, an' ye kin get in as easy as fallin' off a log."

"We don't want to get into no trouble. Who owns it?"

"Don Gordon; but he's off somewhere goin' to school, an' thar's no tellin' when he will be to hum."

"Does he live thar when he's to home?"

"No. He jest stays there a leetle while an' shoots ducks an' geese. That's what he built it fur."

"Rich folks always has nice things," said one of the men who had not spoken before, "but we poor folks has to take what we can get. We're just as good as Gen'ral Gordon too, every day in the week."

"So be I," said Dan, "an' I wouldn't stand back if I wanted to go thar. Thar aint no sense in Don's livin' in that shantee when his father's got a big house with carpets an' a pianner into it, an' chiny an' silver to set the table with."

"No, thar ain't," said the man who had done the most of the talking and who answered to the name of Barlow. "We'll move our duds over thar, if we can get in, an' stay thar until we can fix our boat up a little. If everything works right, we'll have a better one before long."

He got upon his feet as he spoke and drew from under his bunk a short bar of iron, which had more than once come into play when Barlow wanted to force an entrance into somebody's smoke-house. Carrying this in his hand, he went ashore with Dan, who led the way through the woods toward Don Gordon's shooting-box. It was the work of scarcely a moment to pull out one of the staples, and when that had been done, the door swung open, and Dan and his companion went in to take a survey of the interior. It was dry and comfortable, as clean as it could possibly be, and Barlow at once decided that he would live there as long as he remained in that neighborhood.

"It's nice to be rich," said he, seating himself in one of the empty bunks, after touching a match to the pile of light wood which the lawful owner of the shooting-box had left in the fire-place.

"It's nice to have horses an' hounds an' niggers to work for you, while you have nothing to do but ride around the country an' enjoy yourself. That's the way I'd live if I had the chance to make money that your brother's got."

"Yes, Dave makes right smart," said Dan, with some pride in his tones, "an' he don't do no work, nuther. But he's scandalous mean with what he 'arns. He gives it all to mam, an' me an' pap never have none of it. He's gettin' mighty tired of Dave's way of doin', pap is, an' t'other night he told Dave that he could jest fork over every cent of his 'arnin's, an' let pap have the handlin' of 'em. Dave, he said he wouldn't do it, an' I'm looking for the biggest kind of a furse up to our house when next pay-day comes."

"Your pap has got the right to every cent Dave makes till he is twenty-one years old, an' Dave can't hender him from takin' it," said Barlow. "I 'spose he carries a heap of money between the landin' an' the county-seat in that mail-bag of his'n."

"I should say he did!" exclaimed Dan. "Only last night he brought in five thousand dollars for Mr. Brigham—the father of that boy who was

down here with me t'other day. Lester said so this mornin'. He told me too that Dave brings in just that much on the fifteenth day of every month."

Barlow started and looked hard at Dan, and then he looked down at the floor. "Wal, if I was Dave," said he, after a moment's pause, "I'd bring in jest one more of them letters, an' then I'd skip."

"So would I," said Dan. "What does Brigham want with that money? He's got more'n he can use already. Lester said so."

"That's always the way with rich folks, Danie. The more they get the more they want; an' me an' you an' everybody like us could starve for all they care. We're jest as good as they be too. It's a wonder to me that somebody don't go for Dave an' take some of them letters away from him."

"I don't care if they do," answered Dan. "If I should see 'em doin' it, I wouldn't lift a hand to hender 'em. That would bring Dave down from his high hoss, fur Gen'ral Gordon wouldn't never hire him to tote the mail agin; an' then he'd have to scratch for a livin' the way me an' pap does."

"It would serve him right, for bein' so stingy," said Barlow.

"But the feller that goes for him had better watch out," continued Dan, "fur Dave, he carries a double-barrel dissolver in his pocket. It shoots six times, an' he knows how to use it."

"I don't reckon that would stand in the way of anybody who wanted them letters," said Barlow, with a laugh. "If Dave should see a couple of loaded rifles lookin' him square in the face, he wouldn't think of his six-shooter."

"Mebbe he wouldn't," said Dan. "But if I could ride that mail-route the next time Brigham's money-letter comes in—if Dave could be tuk sick, or get lost in the woods, or something so't I could take his place—the fellow that wanted them five thousand wouldn't have no trouble, for I shouldn't have no dissolver with me. But he'd have to give me half."

This was the idea that had so suddenly suggested itself to Dan Evans—to get David out of the way for one day so that he could carry the mail, and give Barlow and his two friends a chance to secure a portion of Mr. Brigham's money. If Barlow had jumped at the bait thus adroitly

thrown out, Dan would have proposed that, after the robbery had been accomplished, they should all take to the flat-boat, push it out into the river, and let the current take it to New Orleans, where they would divide the money and separate, Dan going his way and Barlow and his companions going theirs. Dan thought it was a splendid idea, but Barlow knocked it into a cocked hat by the very next words he uttered.

"You couldn't take your brother's place even for a single day," said he.

"What fur?" demanded Dan, who was greatly surprised. "Can't I ride that thar colt of his'n as well as he kin?"

"I 'spose you can; but that ain't the pint. You've never been swore in fur a mail-carrier, an' so you would have no right to tech that mail-bag. If Dave should be tuk sick or get lost in the woods, Gen'ral Gordon would have to carry the mail himself."

"Whoop!" yelled Dan, jumping up and knocking his heels together. "He'd be a wusser man to fool with nor Dave, fur he's an old soldier."

Barlow made no reply. The boy had given him something to think about, and he was as anxious

to be rid of his presence as Dan was to get rid of his friend Lester Brigham. He left him without taking the trouble to assign any reason for his hurried departure, and went back to his boat. In the course of the day he and his friends transferred their luggage to the shooting-box, and there they lived until they were ordered out by its indignant owner. As their time was not fully occupied they had leisure to talk about the mail-carrier and Mr. Brigham's money ; and we shall presently see how their numerous consultations resulted.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MAIL-CARRIER IN TROUBLE.

“**H**ERE, Dandy! Here Punch! To heel,” said Bert, as he and his four companions started down the shore of the lake in search of their supper.

“Why do you make the dogs go behind?” demanded Hopkins. “Why don’t you hie them on, and perhaps they will stand something for us. I should think this ought to be good quail ground.”

“So it is,” answered Bert. “And if you want a chance at some, we’ll——”

“No we won’t,” interrupted Egan. “If little birds are the height of Hop’s ambition, let him take the pointers some day and go off by himself. We are after ducks now, and we want the dogs to stay with us, and bring our game ashore when we kill it.”

Hopkins made no reply. Like all enthusiastic sportsmen, he had his own ideas of shooting, and

he was much more successful with some kinds of game than he was with others. There was no boy who could beat him in getting over a rough country on horseback, when the hounds were in pursuit of a deer or fox ; he was almost certain to kill every snipe, quail, or grouse that got up before him ; but a wild duck, going down wind with the speed of a lightning express train, bothered him. With all his practice, he had never been able to make a respectable bag of water-fowl ; so he stood around, holding his gun in the hollow of his arm, and watched Egan, who cut down every duck that passed anywhere within seventy-five yards of him. The pointers brought them out as fast as they fell into the lake, and it was not long before Bert and Fred Packard, who were polite enough to allow their guests to do all the shooting, had about as many ducks slung over their shoulders as they wanted to carry.

"This is like the handle of a jug—all on one side," said Hopkins, at length. "I must find something to shoot at, for I can't carry these loads back home with me."

He gradually drew away from his companions as he spoke, but he had no intention of going

off alone. He kept his eyes on the dogs, and when he saw them looking at him, he waved his hand toward the bushes. The intelligent and well-trained animals understood him, and, believing no doubt that hunting upland birds was easier and pleasanter work than retrieving ducks from the cold waters of the lake, they were prompt to obey the order thus silently conveyed to them. Egan and the rest did not see the dogs when they went away, for their attention was fully occupied with a fine flock of mallards, some of which were coming across the lake, holding a course which promised to bring them within easy range of Egan's double-barrel. The latter, who was snugly hidden in a thicket of bushes, had cocked both barrels of his gun, and was waiting for the ducks to come a little nearer to his place of concealment, when all on a sudden they took wing and disappeared up the lake. Egan and his companions looked all around to see what had frightened them, and discovered Hopkins and the pointers in the act of crossing a fence that ran between the woods and a brier-patch.

"Now, Hop, that will never do," cried Egan.

"How are we going to get our ducks ashore if you take the dogs away?"

"Throw chunks on the other side of them and let the waves wash them ashore," was the reply. "I saw a flock of quails over here, and as soon as I get some of them, I will bring the dogs back."

"You're not much of a sportsman, Hop," said Curtis. "There is no such thing as a flock of quails. Covey is the proper word."

"Aw!" said Hopkins. "Well, I don't care what you call them, so long as you will let me have the dogs long enough to shoot some of them. I'll be back in a few minutes."

The duck hunters were obliged to be satisfied with this promise, and when Hopkins made it he fully intended to keep it; but in the ardor of the chase he forgot all about it. The pointers very soon found the covey, which Hopkins had marked down very accurately, and when it took wing at his approach, he brought down five members of it very handsomely. Punch and Dandy dropped to shot—that is, when the gun was fired, they laid down and waited for the hunter to reload—and when they were ordered to seek dead, they executed a manœuvre which some of our best artists, who

love a dog and gun, have often reproduced on canvas.

The reason why dogs are taught to drop to shot is this : The members of the covey do not all fly away at the same time, but some generally remain behind, preferring to trust to concealment rather than to flight. If the dogs were permitted to rush in at once to secure the dead birds, they would flush these laggards, which would get off scot free ; for of course the sportsman could not shoot at them while he held an empty gun in his hands.

“Seek dead,” commanded Hopkins, as soon as he had reloaded his gun ; whereupon the dogs jumped up, and, after running about among the bushes for a few minutes, stopped and came to a point.

“Fetch !” said the hunter ; and in obedience to the order each dog seized a bird. They were coming in with them, when Dandy stopped as if he had suddenly been deprived of all power of action, and came to another point. He was standing a live bird while he held a dead one in his mouth. Punch backed him splendidly—that is, he stopped and pointed also, although he did

not see or smell the bird—and the two presented a picture that Hopkins, had he been handy with the brush or pencil, would have been glad to preserve. He stood and looked at it for at least five minutes, the dogs holding their point stanchly all the while, and then he flushed the bird and brought it down.

“Well done, boys,” said Hopkins, after he had reloaded his gun, and placed the two quails carefully away in the capacious pockets of his shooting-coat; “you have been educated by somebody who understands his business. Seek dead.”

Hopkins had kept his eyes on the surviving members of the covey, and marked them down (by that we mean that he had noted the exact spot on which they alighted); but he did not intend to pay any further attention to them just then. He knew that every minute he spent in hunting them up would be just so much time wasted. He had learned by experience that after a covey has once been flushed, it is almost impossible for the best dogs to find it again. A large number of quails have been seen to settle down in a clump of bushes not more than ten feet in cir-

cumference, and the dogs have run through their place of concealment in every direction without seeing or scenting a single bird. Every sportsman has noticed this, and some of the best of them affirm that the birds are endowed with the power of retaining their scent; but whether that is so or not—and nobody has ever been able to refute it—the fact that they are hard to find when once they have become scattered, remains the same.

“I will attend to you in half an hour,” soliloquized Hopkins, when all the dead birds had been brought in. “By that time you will begin to run around, and the dogs will be able to scent you. Hie on, boys! Hunt up another flock.”

Hopkins had never seen so many quails as he saw that afternoon, not even in Maryland, where they are found in such numbers that they attract sportsmen from distant States. He found so many fresh coveys that he forgot all about the one he had left in the brier-patch. The pointers led him on and on, and Hopkins never stopped to take his bearings, until he had filled the pockets of his shooting-coat so full of birds that they would not hold another one. Then he sat down on a log to rest, and to listen for the roar of

Egan's gun. But he did not hear it, for Egan and his party were on their way to the shooting-box, having secured all the birds they wanted.

"I declare, it is growing dark," said Hopkins; "and if I don't reach the cabin pretty soon, I shall have to stay in the woods all night. That would not be pleasant, for the fellows never would leave off poking fun at me. Come on, boys. I think the lake lies in this direction."

But Hopkins was not the only hunter who has been "completely turned around" in the woods, and instead of going toward the lake, he followed a course that lay parallel with the shore, and about a mile and a half from it. He walked rapidly, passing through Godfrey Evans's old cotton field—now grown up to briars—and within less than two hundred yards of his cabin, and finally found himself sitting on the top rail of a fence which ran along by the side of a smooth, well-beaten road. He did not remember that he had ever seen that road before. He believed that it ran from the river back into the country; but which was the river-end of it and which the country-end, he could not tell. The pointers did not seem disposed to help him out of his quan-

dary, for when he stopped on the top rail of the fence to rest, they laid themselves contentedly down by the side of the road to wait until he was ready to go on.

"I am out of my reckoning as sure as the world," said Hopkins to himself, "and there's no house in sight. Ah! Here comes somebody. I'll ask him if he will tell me which way I must go to find the river—that is, if I can stop him."

Just then Hopkins heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs on the hard road. He knew that the animal was approaching at the top of his speed, but he could not see him, for the thick bushes shut out his view. He jumped off the fence and hurried to the road to intercept the horseman, and just then a riderless nag dashed by, running with the speed of the wind. Hopkins knew him the moment he caught sight of him, for he had seen him before.

"There, sir!" he exclaimed, "I knew that colt would do some damage if he ever got the chance. When you see a horse with a narrow forehead and peaked ears that almost touch at the tips, you want to look out for him. He's gone and tumbled Dave Evans and his mail bag off into the

ditch, and who knows but he may have broken his neck ? ”

As this thought passed through the boy's mind he shouldered his gun, and set off up the road in the direction from which the horse came. He moved along at a rapid trot, looking everywhere for the dismounted mail-carrier, but he would certainly have passed him if he had been alone. The dogs were the first to discover him. After Hopkins had run about half a mile, Dandy and Punch, who were fifty yards in advance of him, suddenly stopped and began barking at something in the fence-corner—the boy could not see what it was, for the bushes concealed it from his view. Believing from the actions of the dogs that they had found a wild animal of some kind, Hopkins cocked both barrels of his gun and walked slowly along the road until he came opposite the fence corner, but still he could see nothing. He tried to send the dogs into the bushes, but they positively refused to go. They barked loudly and looked very savage, but kept close to Hopkins for protection.

“I don't much like the idea of going in there myself,” thought the young hunter, “for there

are such things as bears, panthers and wild-cats in this country ; and neither do I like to go on without having a shot at that varmint, whatever it may be. I won't, either. I am going to see what it is."

His gun was loaded with heavy shot, and Hopkins had the utmost confidence in his skill as a marksman. Having fully made up his mind that he would not be driven from the field by an invisible enemy, he walked cautiously toward the bushes, stooping down now and then to peer into them. The pointers kept pace with him, and finally Dandy, who must have discovered something that set his fears at rest, made a sudden bound and disappeared in the thicket. No sooner was he out of sight than his barking ceased, and when Hopkins parted the bushes with one hand, holding his gun in the other in readiness for a shot, he saw the pointer licking the face of the mail-carrier, who was lying on the ground so effectually gagged with a stick that he could not speak, and so tightly wrapped up in ropes that he could move neither hand nor foot. Hopkins was horrified, as almost any boy would have been under the same circumstances. Although the

thicket was pretty dark the hunter recognized David as readily as he had recognized his horse, and he thought at first that he was dead ; but when his optics became somewhat accustomed to the obscurity, he saw that David's eyes were wide open, and that they were turned toward him with a most appealing expression.

"Well, this is a little ahead of any thing I ever heard of," said Hopkins, who was profoundly astonished. "What are you doing there?"

David made an effort to reply, but the stick that was tied between his teeth checked his utterance. Then it appeared to dawn upon Hopkins that possibly the captive mail-carrier would be grateful for a little assistance, and he proceeded to give it without further loss of time. Letting down the hammers of his gun he laid the weapon on the ground, pulled his knife from his pocket, and in less time than it takes to write it, David was relieved of both gag and bonds and placed upon his feet.

"I have been robbed!" he gasped, as soon as he could speak.

"I suspected as much," replied Hopkins,

calmly. "It could not have happened so very long ago."

"No, I suppose not. The men have not been gone more than ten minutes, probably, but it seems as though I had been a prisoner here for an hour."

"Very likely. Did you recognize the robbers?"

"I did not. I am quite sure I never saw them before. They had made an attempt to disguise themselves as negroes, but I could see their white skins through the black on their faces very plainly."

"Well, come on," said Hopkins. "There's no use in standing here and allowing them to get away with their plunder. Tell me all about it as we go along."

"There's not much to tell," answered David, after he and Hopkins had worked their way out of the bushes to the road. "I was jogging along at a lively pace, never dreaming of danger, when the first thing I knew, three men jumped out of the bushes and halted me. One pointed a cocked rifle straight at my head, another seized my horse by the bits, while the third pulled me and the

mail-bag to the ground. Then the man who was holding my horse let him go——”

“I saw him,” said Hopkins, “and that was a very lucky thing for you. I lost my way, and while I was sitting on the fence, trying to make up my mind which end of this road I ought to take in order to reach the landing, your horse went by. I supposed he had thrown you, and so I came on to see if I could do anything for you.”

“And very grateful I am to you for it,” said David, warmly.

“Of course; that’s all understood; but the credit belongs to your horse and to Don Gordon’s pointers. If I hadn’t seen the horse, I should not have known that anything had happened to you; and if Punch and Dandy had not been with me, I should have gone right by that thicket of bushes without once suspecting that there was anybody hidden there. Well, proceed. The man let your horse go—then what?”

“Then they all jumped on me, and before I fully comprehended the situation, I was helpless and speechless. They turned my pockets inside out, but the only thing they found in them that was worth stealing, was my revolver. One of

them grabbed that and the mail-bag and made off with them, while the other two carried me into the bushes and left me there."

"Did they make much of a haul?" asked Hopkins.

"I can't answer that question, for I don't know what there was in the mail-bag. If they had robbed me a few days ago, that is, on the fifteenth, they would have got something to pay them for their trouble, for I had in my pocket seven hundred dollars of Silas Jones's money that I brought from the county seat for him."

They would have secured something else, also, and that was a check that was worth five thousand dollars to Mr. Brigham, but which would have been of no more value to the robbers than so much waste paper. The mail-carrier, however, was not aware of that fact, and if Lester Brigham had only been wise enough to keep his own counsel, no one in the settlement, except those interested, would have known that David was ever intrusted with money or its equivalent.

"I'll never carry any more funds for anybody," said David, choking back a sob. "Indeed, I don't suppose I shall ever have another chance."

"Why not?" asked Hopkins. "You are in no way to blame for the loss of your mail-bag."

"I know it; and I am very glad indeed that I was not found and released by any one who lives in the settlement. As you are a stranger here you are, of course, neither a friend nor an enemy to me, and consequently you can have no object in defending or condemning me."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean just this: There is no one in the neighborhood who has warmer friends and more bitter enemies than I have. I know that my friends will stand by me in my trouble, but there are a good many in the settlement who will say that I wasn't robbed at all—that I stole the mail and made up a story to cover my guilt. I am neither blind nor deaf, and I can put my hand on a dozen men and boys who are watching for a chance to throw me out of my position so that they can apply for it themselves. No one ever thought the mail-carrier's berth was worth anything until I got it, and now everybody wants it."

"Let 'em want," said Hopkins, encouragingly. "You have nothing to fear so long as you retain

the confidence of Don's father. We'll go and see him the first thing. Being a magistrate, he will, of course, know just how to go to work to find and arrest those fellows."

The boy's confidence in General Gordon was not misplaced, but it is doubtful if that gentleman, with all his shrewdness, could have effected the capture of the robbers as easily as he did, had it not been for the fact that the quick-witted Don obtained a clue for him from a most unexpected quarter.

We left Don and his friends sitting in their cosy room at the shooting-box waiting for supper, which was served in due time. Curtis and Egan were astonished at the quantity and variety of the viands which old Cuff spread before them, and paid the highest possible compliment to his skill as a cook and caterer by eating until they could find room for no more. When he pushed his chair away from the table, after trying in vain to dispose of the last piece of roast duck that Cuff had placed before him, Egan declared that he never could go to bed after such a supper as that, and proposed that they should make another effort to find out where Hopkins was. Don said

he thought it would be a good plan ; so Egan took down his double-barrel, filled one of his pockets with cartridges and started for the door. Just as he opened it the report of a gun, fired twice in rapid succession, came echoing across the lake. It sounded from the direction of Godfrey Evans's cabin.

"There he is now," said Bert.

In order to make sure of it Curtis set up a very fair imitation of a war-whoop (he and the rest of the academy boys had been practicing on it ever since the Indians made the attack on their camp) and before the echoes it awakened had wholly died away, an answering whoop came from the other side of the water.

"It is Hop," said Don, as he ran into the cabin after his cap. "Shove off the sail-boat, fellows, and pile in."

In less than a quarter of an hour the sail-boat had been launched and pulled across to the opposite side of the lake. Hopkins was not at the landing to meet them, so the boat's painter was made fast to a tree, and Don and the rest started toward Godfrey's cabin. By the aid of the light which streamed through the open door,

Don could see that his friend was standing in the yard, that David and his mother were with him, and that all three appeared to be conversing earnestly with a horseman who had just stopped there. When the latter saw Don and his party approaching, he put spurs to his nag and galloped away.

“What did I tell you, Mr. Hopkins?” said David, bitterly. “There are twenty men and more in this settlement who believe just as Mr. Owens does.”

“What’s the trouble here?” inquired Don, “and what does Mr. Owens believe?”

“O, Mr. Don, it’s dreadful,” cried Mrs. Evans, covering her face with her hands and sinking down upon the bench beside the door. “To think that my David should ever be accused of such a crime!”

“The trouble is, that the mail has been stolen,” said Hopkins, “and Mr. Owens, who was ordered out by the constable to assist in raising a ‘hue and cry’ after the robbers, has just been down here to comfort David with the assurance that he doesn’t believe a word of his story.”

“He had the impudence to tell me, to my face,

that I was the thief," exclaimed David, hotly. "He said that when I first began to ride the route he told several people about here that that mail would get into trouble through me sooner or later, and he seems delighted to find that his prediction has been fulfilled."

"Why—I—I. *Eh?*" cried Don, who was utterly astounded; while the rest of the party, no less astonished and bewildered, crowded up closer to the speaker in order to catch every word.

"I don't wonder that you are surprised," said Hopkins. "So was I, when I found him back there in the country, bound and gagged, and laid away in a fence corner. Mr. Owens declares that David tied himself, but I know better."

"What are you trying to get at, anyhow?" exclaimed Bert.

"That's what I'd like to know," chimed in Don. "Now, Dave, begin at the beginning and tell your story so that we can understand it."

David complied, and for a few minutes held his auditors spell-bound. After he had described how the robbers had tied his hands and feet and concealed him in the bushes, Hopkins took up the

narrative and told his part of it, adding that he and David had gone straight to the general, who, after listening to their story, took immediate steps to effect the capture of the robbers.

“But I am very much afraid that he will never find them,” said Hopkins. “He acknowledged that he didn’t suspect anybody, and David says he never saw the men before. Besides, they were disguised as negroes.”

“I don’t care for that,” said Don. “I know who did it, and so do you. Stay here, everybody.”

To the surprise of all his companions, Don walked with a firm and rapid step straight into the cabin and closed the door behind him. A moment later a frightened scream came from the inside, followed by the words—

“Go way, Mr. Don! Go way, I tell ye. I didn’t tuk it—I sw’ar I didn’t; an’ if you lay an ugly hand onto me I’ll make daylight shine through you as sure—whoop!”

Just then a rifle cracked, and the cabin shook all over as some heavy body fell violently to the floor. These alarming sounds seemed to freeze the blood in the veins of those who listened to

them. The boys were struck dumb and motionless with horror, while Mrs. Evans wrung her hands silently for a moment and then fell off the bench in a dead faint. They knew instinctively what had happened inside the cabin. Bert was the first to recover his power of action. He ran for the door, but it would not open for him. When Don closed it he had pulled in the latch-string so that his companions could not follow him.

"Stand out of the way, Bert," cried Hopkins, "and give me a chance at it."

So saying, Hopkins backed off a few paces and launched his hundred and eighty pounds against the door with all the force he could command. The weak wooden hinges gave way beneath his weight, and the door landed in the middle of the cabin with Hopkins on top of it. Bert and the rest crowded in as soon as the way was opened for them, and although their fears were instantly allayed by the scene that was presented to their gaze, their wonder was greatly increased. Dan Evans was lying flat upon his back, and Don Gordon was holding him down with the greatest ease, in spite of Dan's frantic efforts to get up.

"O, Don!" cried Bert. "Did he hit you?"

“No,” was the encouraging reply. “I am all right. You fellows go out, please, and leave us alone. I want to ask Dan a few questions.”

The boys mechanically obeyed, looking inquiringly at one another and shaking their heads as if to say that all attempts at explanation would be useless. The whole proceeding was a deep mystery, and so it would remain until Don was ready to clear it up.

CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSION.

WHILE Don was listening to the story of the robbery as related by David and Hopkins, he stood in such a position that he could look through the open door of the cabin and command a view of the interior. There was no one in there except Dan Evans, who, instead of coming out to hear the story, as almost any boy would have done, kept his seat by the fireplace. The light shone full upon him, and Don could see that he was ill at ease. He cast furtive glances toward the excited group in front of the door, twisted nervously about on his chair, and acted altogether as if he felt very miserable. Don was surprised at first, and finally he became suspicious.

“That fellow knows more about this afternoon’s work than any of us,” said he to himself. “He doesn’t act that way without some good reason. I believe it will pay to ask him a few questions.”

The sequel proved that our hero had struck a

warm trail the very first time trying. When Dan found himself shut up in the cabin, and Don Gordon standing between him and the door and cutting off his only way of escape, he became terribly alarmed, and confessed his guilt without waiting to be questioned. Scarcely realizing what he was doing, he broke out into loud protestations of innocence, and seizing his rifle, which stood in the corner behind him, declared that he would shoot the intruder if the latter laid a hand upon him. The threat was by no means an idle one. Dan fully intended to carry it out, but fortunately for him and all concerned, he had to deal with one who always kept a level head upon his shoulders. Before Dan had fairly ceased speaking, Don sprang clear across the cabin with one cat-like bound, seized the threatening rifle with one hand, laid hold of Dan's collar with the other, and, bringing all his strength and skill into play, threw him to the floor with the greatest violence. In the struggle the rifle was discharged, but the bullet passed harmlessly through the roof. A few seconds later some heavy body came against the door, which was broken from its hinges, and Don's companions came hurrying in, expecting

to find him wounded or dead. They did not see how it could be otherwise, for there was not a better rifle-shot in the settlement than Dan Evans. Don quickly set their fears at rest by assuring them that he was "all right," and at his request the boys went out again, leaving him alone with his captive.

"Now, Dan, what do you know about this miserable business?" said Don, as soon as his friends had left the cabin. "Believe me when I tell you that it will be better for you if you tell the truth. Dave is backed up by the whole United States government, and the fellows who waylaid him are bound to be captured. They cannot possibly escape."

"I'm a hoss in the cane an' hard to curry," replied Dan; by which he meant that he was one who could not be easily conquered. In order to prove the truth of his assertion, he began struggling desperately; but Don seized him by both wrists, and crossing his arms upon his breast held him as if he had been screwed up in a vise.

"Answer my questions and then you can get up," said Don, calmly. "Refuse, and I will

take you before my father, who will put you in the calaboose as an accomplice in this robbery."

"Don," said Bert, thrusting his head in at the door, "Mrs. Evans says that Dan has been at home all the afternoon; so, of course, he could have had no hand in stealing the mail."

"No, I didn't, Mr. Don. I sw'ar I didn't," exclaimed Dan, who, finding that resistance was useless, began to shed tears copiously. "I didn't tech that thar mail-bag."

"I haven't said that you did," answered Don. "But you know who did touch it, and I want you to tell me all about it. Now be quick: who's got it?"

"I reckon it must be Barlow," whined Dan.

"Who's Barlow?"

"He's one of the fellers who was in your shootin'-box when you come thar this mornin'. He lives in that thar flat-boat that's tied up to the river bank."

"I thought so from the first," said Don to himself. "I knew those vagabonds would raise some kind of a row before they left." Then aloud, he added: "How do you know that they were in

the shooting-box when I went there this morning?"

"Kase I was thar—me an' Lester Brigham."

"Lester Brigham!" repeated Don.

"Yes. Me an' him goes huntin' a'most every day."

Don was profoundly astonished. He told himself that Lester must be getting very low down in the world if he were willing to make a daily companion of so worthless a fellow as Dan Evans.

"Well, this thing was all cut and dried, wasn't it?" said he. "You planned the robbery, and Barlow and his two friends did the work. Was that the way of it?"

"I didn't plan nothin'," protested Dan. "Don't hold me so tight, Mr. Don, an' I'll tell ye what's the gospel truth. Lester, he told me that Dave was bringin' in right smart of money for his pap every month, an' I told Barlow of it, an' Barlow he said he'd like to have some of it so't he could live like rich folks do. That's all I done, Mr. Don, sure's yer born—honor bright, an' hope to die if it aint."

"You didn't say anything to Barlow about going halvers with you?"

“Nary word, Mr. Don. “Nary blessed word.”

Don didn't believe this, for Dan was almost too earnest in his denial. But he had obtained a clue, and that was what he wanted.

“Dan,” said he, throwing all the emphasis he could into his words, “you had better take my advice and stay right here at home and mind your own business until this thing is settled. You will get yourself into trouble if you don't. Now do as you please.”

So saying he helped Dan to his feet and joined his friends in front of the cabin. He spoke encouragingly to Mrs. Evans who was sobbing violently, assured David that there was no reason why he should be so down-hearted, and started for his sail-boat, followed by his companions. Of course the latter were full of questions. They had heard all that passed in the cabin, and knew that Dan Evans and Lester Brigham were in a measure responsible for the robbery; but what had put it into Don's head to accuse Dan? That was something they could not understand.

“Dan gave himself away by his actions,” said Don, in explanation. “That's the whole secret of the matter. But I don't know what is to be-

come of those two boys. Lester can't get much lower by land, and as for Dan—he'll end his days in the penitentiary if he keeps on. He meant to shoot me to-night; I could see it in his eye. Now we'll go home and tell father all about it."

Propelled by four oars the sail-boat moved swiftly through the water, and at the end of twenty minutes she was made fast to the jetty, and the boys were on their way to the house. When they reached the back porch they found three horses hitched there, and General Gordon in conversation with the constable and Godfrey Evans. The latter was stamping about in a great rage, flourishing his arms over his head, and acting like one demented.

"Why, what brings you boys here?" asked the general.

"We have news for you," replied Don, who then went on to give a circumstantial account of the incidents that had just transpired at Godfrey's cabin. Godfrey could hardly believe his ears. When he learned that Dan was one of the indirect causes of the robbery, he jumped up, knocked his heels together and uttered a yell that could have been heard a mile away.

“Gen’ral,” said he, picking up his rifle which he had laid upon the porch, “I’ll go hum an’ take the cowhide an’ I’ll larrup that thar boy——”

“Calm yourself, Godfrey,” interrupted the general. “You will only make matters worse if you do that. What do you advise, Mr. Ross?” he added, turning to the constable.

“Is there any way to get Don’s sail-boat out of the lake into the river?” asked the officer.

“Of course there is,” answered Don. “We can row her up the pass and drag her over the levee. She’s heavy, but we have the force here to do it.”

“Then my advice is, that we find and search that house-boat at once,” said the constable. “Mr. Don, you would make a first-rate detective.”

The general went into the house to make out a search-warrant, and the boys hurried back to the jetty to put the sail-boat in readiness for her trip down the river. As the mast had been stepped that morning, the bowsprit put in, the sails bent on and the running rigging rove, all they had to do was to loosen the canvas and select those who were to pull the oars.

"There's a splendid breeze on," said Don, who had never been able to make up his mind which he liked best -- sailing, horse-back riding, or shooting. "It blows right down the river, too. We can't sail out because the pass is so narrow; but when we get out into the Mississippi, will go flying. Now, then, why doesn't father come?"

The general was making out a warrant empowering the constable to search the house-boat when they found it, and then he lingered to unsaddle the horses which he had brought out for his own use and Godfrey's. When these duties had been performed, he and Godfrey and the constable came down to the jetty and took their seats in the sail-boat, which was promptly pushed off and headed up the pass. Half an hour sufficed for the oarsmen to bring her to the levee, over which she was hauled without the least trouble. Then came another short stretch through which she was propelled by the oars; and as soon as she was fairly out of the pass and began to feel the force of the wind and the current, the oars were drawn in, Don seated himself at the helm, Bert, with Fred and Joe Packard's assist-

ance, hoisted the sails, the sheets were let out and the pursuit was begun.

"Keep as close in to shore as you can, Don," said Bert. "It's pretty dark, and we may pass her before we know it."

"You don't expect to see that house-boat where you found her this morning, do you?" said Don. "It's eleven o'clock, isn't it? Well, she is twenty miles down the river by this time. Keep a bright look-out for lights, everybody. We don't want to let some steamboat run us down before we know it."

Although he knew he was wasting time in doing it, Don kept the boat as close to the bank as he could with safety, but nothing was to be seen of the piratical craft of which they were in search. When Bert announced that they had passed the place where she had been moored in the morning, Don drew in the sheets a little, and held the boat's head diagonally across the river in order to strike the stronger current of the channel. Then the sail-boat began to show the speed of which she was capable; and then, too, the general enjoined silence upon all her occupants.

"The night is comparatively quiet," said he,

"and the rattling of an oar, or a word spoken in a loud tone of voice, can be heard a long distance. We have one advantage over the crew of that flat-boat: we can get out of the way of a steamboat and they can't; so they will have to carry lights for their protection."

Under Don's skillful management the little boat flew swiftly along, keeping in the channel when her course was clear, and making all haste to get out of it as often as the vigilant look-out announced that there were lights ahead. Two hours passed, and nothing had been seen of the flat-boat.

"I reckon we've missed her," said the constable. "She has tied up to the bank somewhere, and we have run by her in the dark."

"If that is the case, there is only one thing we can do," said Don. "We'll keep on down the river until day-light, and then we'll come about and beat back again, making a close examination of each shore. She can't escape us, unless she hauls into one of these little bayous and gets out of sight among the bushes."

"And if her crew know the river and are at all sharp, that is just what they will do," said the constable.

Just then a deep-toned whistle sounded in the bend below them, and instantly the conversation ceased and everybody was on the alert, and listening with all his ears to catch the reply. It came at length, but it was not a whistle ; it was a prolonged blast from a tin horn. There was a commotion among the boys, and their excitement arose to fever heat.

“There she is,” said Bert, confidently.

“Don’t be too hasty in jumping at conclusions,” said his father, in a quiet tone.

“There’s a flat-boat in the bend below us, and I am sure of it,” answered Bert.

“So am I ; but still it may not be the one we want to find. There is more than one flat-boat on this river, you know.”

Don brought his boat close to the wind, and went scudding across the river to get out of the steamer’s way. He held well over toward the eastern shore, and when he stood off on the other tack the steamer had passed, and Bert announced, in a low tone, that there were lights straight ahead. They were close to the water, and the sail-boat’s crew had but one opinion concerning them. They belonged to a flat-boat, but whether

or not it was the one of which they were in pursuit, was a question that only time could solve.

"Lay us aboard of her without any ceremony," said the general. "Bert, stand by with the boat-hook. We must move quickly, and give them no chance to throw the mail overboard, if they have got it."

Don kept the bow of his little craft pointed toward the flat-boat, and so silently did she move through the water that the man who stood at the steering-oar, keeping a sharp look-out in front of him, but never thinking to look behind, was entirely unconscious of her approach. Presently Bert reached for the boat-hook, at the same time giving a nod that everybody understood. A few minutes more would decide whether they were on the right track or not. Bert stood up in his place; Don, at a sign from his father, paid out the main-sheet rapidly, thus bringing his craft broadside to the house-boat, and just then the man at the steering-oar awoke from his reverie and turned quickly about.

"Keep away, there!" he shouted, in great alarm. "Keep away, or you'll sink us."

Don did not want to sink the house-boat, but he wanted to come alongside of her, and he did it a moment later in a very creditable manner. The instant the two boats touched, General Gordon and his party sprang over the side and ran into the cabin, some going in at the back door and the others at the front, leaving Don and Bert to act as grappling-irons, and to keep the boats from drifting apart. The man at the steering-oar was captured by Egan, who stood guard over him with his double-barrel, and Barlow and his companion, who were busy in the cabin, were covered by the constable's revolver and Godfrey Evans's rifle before they had time to think of their weapons.

"This looks like business," said the officer, handing his six-shooter to Fred Packard, and drawing three pairs of handcuffs from his pocket.

The others thought so too. David's mail-bag lay upon the table—he would never carry it again, for it had been ruined by being cut open with a knife—and its contents were scattered about over the floor and in the bunks. The most of the letters had been torn open, and the robbers had reaped a very fair reward for their trouble,

having secured about forty dollars in greenbacks, and a check for three hundred dollars, drawn by a country merchant in favor of his creditors in Memphis. The general took charge of the bills and the check, while the constable lost no time in putting the irons on Barlow and his confederate.

"Where's the other?" said he. "There ought to be three of them."

"Here he is," said Egan, who marched his prisoner into the cabin and turned him over to the officer, at the same time making a sergeant's salute, as he would if he had been at the academy.

"I told you jest how it would be," said the steersman, glaring savagely at Barlow as he felt the cold handcuffs clasped about his wrists. "Why didn't you hide, as I wanted you to do, instead of trying to run?"

"You would have showed a little more sense if you had done that," said the constable, "but on the whole, we are very well satisfied. Now keep still, all of you," he added, shaking his finger at the women, who, having checked their loud lamentations, now showed a disposition to become abusive. "Godfrey, keep your eye on

these men until they are safe under lock and key."

Godfrey was just the one for this business. There was only one thing that would have suited him better, and that was an order to punch the prisoners' heads. For the first time his eyes were opened to the fact that David was a great help to the family, and that the loss of his position as mail-carrier would be a serious blow to all of them.

"If me an' Dan would only wake up an' *stay* woke up, we'd get along well enough," he said to himself, as he leaned on his long rifle and looked thoughtfully at the floor. "Dave's doin' his shar', an' me an' that lazy, good-for-nothin' Dan has got to do our'n from this day on; an' that's just all thar is about it. Dan never would a thought of puttin' anybody up to robbin' Dave if he had been to work, an' I'll see that he has plenty to do in futur', I bet ye."

While General Gordon and the constable were gathering up the mail and putting it into the bag, they had much to talk about. They had secured the robbers, and the next thing was to get them back to Rochdale. They had about

decided that they would tie the house-boat to the bank and take the prisoners up the river in the sail-boat, when Curtis came in to say that there were lights below them ; whereupon the general picked up Barlow's horn and went out to answer the steamer's signals. This having been done, he waited for her to come abreast of the flat-boat. She proved to be a large stern-wheeler with a tow of empty coal barges.

"Steamer, ahoy !" shouted the general.

"Hallo !" responded a man who was standing on the hurricane-deck near the bell.

"What steamer is that ?"

"The 'B No. 2' of Pittsburg."

"Is that you, Captain Pratt ?"

"Yes ; but that can't be you, Gordon."

The general replied that it *was* he ; and upon receiving this reply the captain raised his hand, the pilot rang the stopping-bell, and the steamer's wheel hung motionless in the water.

"Why, Gordon, what in the world are you doing here at this hour - in the morning ?" demanded the captain.

"Can't stop to explain now," answered the

general. "Will you give us a lift as far as Rochdale?"

"Of course I will. Can you bring that tub of yours alongside?"

They could and they did. The sails were hauled down instantly, the oars were manned and the flat-boat was hauled over and made fast to the stern of the steamer's tow. Then the general went on board the steamer to explain matters to Captain Pratt, while the boys lingered to look after the safety of the sail-boat. Having tied her to one of the barges so that she would ride easily, they followed the general on board the "B," and seated themselves on the quarter-deck to talk over the exciting events of the night. Every one of them gave Don Gordon great credit for what he had done. If he had not been sharp enough to see guilt in Dan Evans's face and actions, there was no knowing when the robbers would have been captured.

"Young gemmen," said the negro steward, "won't you step into de cabin an' hab a bite of lunch? You mus' be hungry after your long, cold ride."

The boys were hungry and cold, too, although

they did not know it until that moment. They did ample justice to the steward's lunch, and also to his breakfast which was served at seven o'clock. At eight they passed Rochdale, and half an hour later they cast loose from the tow and began the work of pulling their clumsy prize and its occupants to the landing.

The "hue and cry" which the constable had raised the night before had brought the loafers and the neighboring planters out in full force, and there was a large crowd to welcome them as they went ashore with their prisoners. As there was no place in Rochdale in which the robbers could be confined, the preliminary examination was held at once, the women being tried as accessories. They all pleaded guilty—(as there were ten witnesses present who could testify that the stolen mail was found in their possession, and David Evans easily identified them by their clothing, they could not do otherwise)—and half an hour later they were on their way to the county-seat, where they were to be kept in jail until their trial came off. When they and their guards were out of sight, General Gordon and his party, which included David Evans and his

father, got into the sail-boat and started for the lake.

"I didn't see Lester and Dan anywhere," said Bert, when the sail-boat had been made fast to the jetty, and David and Godfrey had started for home. "I wonder if they have taken to the woods."

"I should think they would want to go there or somewhere else," replied Don. "But if Judge Packard thinks their presence necessary when the trial comes off, he can easily find means to make them show themselves. Godfrey won't sleep soundly until he gets his hand on Dan's collar. That boy will have to work hard now to make amends for what he has done."

The boys spent an hour or two in the house, giving Mrs. Gordon and her daughters a graphic account of their night's experience, and then set out for the shooting-box, where a cordial welcome and a hot dinner awaited them. Old Cuff had passed the night in a fever of suspense ; but, like the faithful fellow he was, he stuck to his post, and held himself in readiness to defend the cabin with the aid of the hounds and a big club. If Barlow and his friends had tried to burn it, as

one of them had threatened to do, they would have got themselves into business.

The incidents we have just described were by no means the only interesting or exciting ones that happened while Egan, Curtis and Hopkins remained at the shooting-box. The boys shot water-fowl until they were tired of the sport, and frequently entertained their friends, both male and female, who came over to see how they were getting on. They drove the ridges for deer, hunted wild turkeys and ate many a dinner of quails that Hopkins shot for them over Don Gordon's pointers. It was a fortunate thing for David Evans that Hopkins got lost the first time he went quail hunting, for the story he told and the results that came of it, effectually silenced those who had hoped to prove that David stole the mail himself.

The days flew on, and in a short time—it seemed a very short time to all of them—Don's guests began to talk of going home. They all dreaded the separation, for they had become very much attached to one another. "But it won't be for any great length of time, fellows," said Curtis. "The members of our happy family will all come

together again on the fifteenth of January—all except Fred and Joe, and I really wish they were coming too—and the next time we go hunting it will be in the wilks of Maine. I can't promise that we shall have a chase after mail-robbers, but I may be able to show you a moose, and you Southerners will have a chance to try your hands at something that will be entirely new to you—I mean fly-fishing. We shall have just enough of that to let you see what a five or six-pound trout can do when he makes up his mind to fight. I assure you that I shall try by every means in my power to make your sojourn with me as pleasant as you have made my visit here.”

The parting time came at last, and the Gray Eagle took Don's guests up the river. The four boys they left behind them were very lonely after that. Don's first care was to strip the shooting-box and lock it. He did not want to go there any more, for there were too many things in it that reminded him of his absent friends. The antlers which had been given up to Egan for the exclusive use of his “blunderbuss,” the clock-bracket and wall-pocket that Curtis had fashioned with his knife, the camp-chair which had given

away with a great crash and let Hopkins down upon the floor—all these spoke eloquently of the days that were gone, and Don could hardly endure the sight of them. Of course this feeling of loneliness wore away after a while, and the brothers enjoyed themselves during the holidays as they always did ; but when the time came for them to return to Bridgeport, they were ready and waiting.

Their second year at the academy proved to be an eventful one. Some things happened which, like the night attack of the Mount Pleasant Indians, were not down on the programme ; and what they were, and how Don and Bert behaved themselves at school, what they saw and what they did for amusement when they went home with Curtis at the close of the term, shall be told in "THE ROD AND GUN CLUB."

THE END.

